from Kaneohe
and Jim with
love.
Xmas 1942.

FROM A COLLEGE WINDOW

By A. C. BENSON

THIN PAPER EDITION. *Cloth or Leather*

THE HOUSE OF QUIET
THE THREAD OF GOLD
THE SILENT ISLE
THE UPTON LETTERS
ALONG THE ROAD
FROM A COLLEGE WINDOW

OTHER EDITIONS

THE SILENT ISLE
FROM A COLLEGE WINDOW
ALONG THE ROAD
THE UPTON LETTERS
FATHER PAYNE
THY ROD AND THY STAFF
WHERE NO FEAR WAS
ESCAPE, AND OTHER ESSAYS
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MEMORIES AND FRIENDS
A THOUGHT FOR EVERY DAY. Selected from the Works of A. C. BENSON

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FROM A COLLEGE WINDOW

BY A. C. BENSON

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NOTE

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A. C. B.

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* These papers have already appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine*.

FROM A COLLEGE WINDOW

I

THE POINT OF VIEW

I HAVE lately come to perceive that the one thing which gives value to any piece of art, whether it be book, or picture, or music, is that subtle and evasive thing which is called personality. No amount of labour, of zest, even of accomplishment, can make up for the absence of this quality. It must be an almost wholly instinctive thing, I believe. Of course, the mere presence of personality in a work of art is not sufficient, because the personality revealed may be lacking in charm; and charm, again, is an instinctive thing. No artist can set out to capture charm; he will toil all the night and take nothing; but what every artist can and must aim at, is to have a perfectly sincere point of view. He must take his chance as to whether his point of view is an attractive one; but sincerity is the one indispensable thing. It is useless to take opinions on trust, to retail

them, to adopt them; they must be formed, created, truly felt. The work of a sincere artist is almost certain to have some value; the work of an insincere artist is of its very nature worthless.

I mean to try, in the pages that follow, to be as sincere as I can. It is not an easy task, though it may seem so; for it means a certain disentangling of the things that one has perceived and felt for oneself from the prejudices and preferences that have been inherited, or stuck like burs upon the soul by education and circumstance.

It may be asked why I should thus obtrude my point of view in print; why I should not keep my precious experience to myself; what the value of it is to other people? Well, the answer to that is that it helps our sense of balance and proportion to know how other people are looking at life, what they expect from it, what they find in it, and what they do not find. I have myself an intense curiosity about other people's point of view, what they do when they are alone, and what they think about. Edward FitzGerald said that he wished we had more biographies of obscure persons. How often have I myself wished to ask simple, silent, deferential people, such as station-masters, butlers, gardeners, what they make of it all! Yet one cannot do it, and even if one could, ten to one they would not or could not tell you. But

here is going to be a sedate confession. I am going to take the world into my confidence, and say, if I can, what I think and feel about the little bit of experience which I call my life, which seems to me such a strange and often so bewildering a thing.

Let me speak, then, plainly of what that life has been, and tell what my point of view is. I was brought up on ordinary English lines. My father, in a busy life, held a series of what may be called high official positions. He was an idealist, who, owing to a vigorous power of practical organisation and a mastery of detail, was essentially a man of affairs. Yet he contrived to be a student too. Thus, owing to the fact that he often shifted his headquarters, I have seen a good deal of general society in several parts of England. Moreover, I was brought up in a distinctly intellectual atmosphere.

I was at a big public school, and gained a scholarship at the University. I was a moderate scholar and a competent athlete; but I will add that I had always a strong literary bent. I took in younger days little interest in history or politics, and tended rather to live an inner life in the region of friendship and the artistic emotions. If I had been possessed of private means, I should, no doubt, have become a full-fledged dilettante,

But that doubtful privilege was denied me, and for a good many years I lived a busy and fairly successful life as a master at a big public school.

I will not dwell at length upon this, but I will say that I gained a great interest in the science of education, and acquired profound misgivings as to the nature of the intellectual process known by the name of secondary education. More and more I began to perceive that it is conducted on diffuse, detailed, unbusiness-like lines. I tried my best, as far as it was consistent with loyalty to an established system, to correct the faulty bias. But it was with a profound relief that I found myself suddenly provided with a literary task of deep interest, and enabled to quit my scholastic labours. At the same time, I am deeply grateful for the practical experience I was enabled to gain, and even more for the many true and pleasant friendships with colleagues, parents, and boys that I was allowed to form.

What a waste of mental energy it is to be careful and troubled about one's path in life! Quite unexpectedly, at this juncture, came my election to a college Fellowship, giving me the one life that I had always eagerly desired, and the possibility of which had always seemed closed to me.

I became then a member of a small and definite

society, with a few prescribed duties, just enough, so to speak, to form a hem to my life of comparative leisure. I had acquired and kept, all through my life as a schoolmaster, the habit of continuous literary work; not from a sense of duty, but simply from instinctive pleasure. I found myself at once at home in my small and beautiful college, rich with all kinds of ancient and venerable traditions, in buildings of humble and subtle grace. The little dark-roofed chapel, where I have a stall of my own; the galleried hall, with its armorial glass; the low, book-lined library; the panelled combination-room, with its dim portraits of old worthies: how sweet a setting for a quiet life! Then, too, I have my own spacious rooms, with a peaceful outlook into a big close, half orchard, half garden, with bird-haunted thickets and immemorial trees, bounded by a slow river.

And then, to teach me how "to borrow life and not grow old," the happy tide of fresh and vigorous life all about me, brisk, confident, cheerful young men, friendly, sensible, amenable, at that pleasant time when the world begins to open its rich pages of experience, undimmed at present by anxiety or care.

My college is one of the smallest in the University. Last night in Hall I sate next a distinguished man, who is, moreover, very accessible and pleasant.

He unfolded to me his desires for the University. He would like to amalgamate all the small colleges into groups, so as to have about half-a-dozen colleges in all. He said, and evidently thought, that little colleges are woefully circumscribed and petty places; that most of the better men go to the two or three leading colleges, while the little establishments are like small backwaters out of the main stream. They elect, he said, their own men to Fellowships; they resist improvements; much money is wasted in management, and the whole thing is minute and feeble. I am afraid it is true in a way; but, on the other hand, I think that a large college has its defects too. There is no real college spirit there; it is very nice for two or three sets. But the different schools which supply a big college form each its own set there; and if a man goes there from a leading public school, he falls into his respective set, lives under the traditions and in the gossip of his old school, and gets to know hardly any one from other schools. Then the men who come up from smaller places just form small inferior sets of their own, and really get very little good out of the place. Big colleges keep up their prestige because the best men tend to go to them; but I think they do very little for the ordinary men who have fewer social advantages to start with.

The only cure, said my friend, for these smaller places is to throw their Fellowships open, and try to get public-spirited and liberal-minded Dons. Then, he added, they ought to specialise in some one branch of University teaching, so that the men who belonged to a particular department would tend to go there.

Well, to-day was a wet day, so I did what I particularly enjoy—I went off for a slow stroll, and poked about among some of the smaller colleges. I declare that the idea of tying them all together seemed to me to be a horrible piece of vandalism. These sweet and beautiful little places, with a quiet, dignified history and tradition of their own, are very attractive and beautiful. I went and explored a little college I am ashamed to say I had never visited before. It shows a poor plastered front to the street, but the old place is there behind the plaster. I went into a tiny, dark chapel, with a high pillared pediment of carved wood behind the altar, a rich ceiling, and some fine columned alcoves where the dignitaries sit. Out of the gallery opens a venerable library, with a regretful air of the past about its faded volumes in their high presses, as though it sadly said, "I am of yesterday." Then we found ourselves in a spacious panelled Hall, with a great oriel looking out into a peaceful garden,

embowered in great trees, with smiling lawns. All round the Hall hung portraits of old worthies—peers, judges, and bishops, with some rubicund wigged Masters. I like to think of the obscure and yet dignified lives that have been lived in these quaint and stately chambers. I suppose that there used to be a great deal of tippling and low gossip in the old days of the vinous, idle Fellows, who hung on for life, forgetting their books, and just trying to dissipate boredom. One tends to think that it was all like that; and yet, doubtless, there were quiet lives of study and meditation led here by wise and simple men who have long since mouldered into dust. And all that dull rioting is happily over. The whole place is full of activity and happiness. There is, if anything, among the Dons, too much business, too many meetings, too much teaching, and the life of mere study is neglected. But it pleases me to think that even now there are men who live quietly among their books, unambitious, perhaps unproductive, but forgetting the flight of time, and looking out into a pleasant garden, with its rustling trees, among the sound of mellow bells. We are, most of us, too much in a fuss nowadays to live these gentle, innocent, and beautiful lives; and yet the University is a place where a poor man, if he be virtuous, may lead a life of dignity and

simplicity, and refined happiness. We make the mistake of thinking that all can be done by precept, when, as a matter of fact, example is no less potent a force. To make such quiet lives possible was to a great extent what these stately and beautiful places were founded for—that there should be in the busy world a corner where activities should not be so urgent, and where life should pass like an old dream, tinged with delicate colour and soft sound. I declare I do not know that it is more virtuous to be a clerk in a bank, toiling day by day that others should be rich, than to live in thought and meditation, with a heart open to sweet influences and pure hopes. And yet it seems to be held nowadays that virtue is bound up with practical life. If a man is content to abjure wealth and to forego marriage, to live simply without luxuries, he may spend a very dignified, gentle life here, and at the same time he may be really useful. It is a thing which is well worth doing to attempt the reconciliation between the old and the young. Boys come up here under the impression that their pastors and teachers are all about fifty ; they think of them as sensible, narrow-minded men, and, like Melchizedek, without beginning of days or end of life. They suppose that they like marking mistakes in exercises with blue pencil, and take delight in showing their power by setting

punishments. It does not often occur to them that schoolmasters may be pathetically anxious to guide boys right, and to guard them from evil. They think of them as devoid of passions and prejudices, with a little dreary space to traverse before they sink into the tomb. Even in homes, how seldom does a perfectly simple human relation exist between a boy and his father! There is often a great deal of affection on both sides, but little *camaraderie*. Little boys are odd, tiresome creatures in many ways, with savage instincts; and I suppose many fathers feel that, if they are to maintain their authority, they must be a little distant and inscrutable. A boy goes for sympathy and companionship to his mother and sisters, not often to his father. Now a Don may do something to put this straight, if he has the will. One of the best friends I ever had was an elderly Don at my own college, who had been a contemporary of my father's. He liked young men; and I used to consult him and ask his advice in things in which I could not well consult my own contemporaries. It is not necessary to be extravagantly youthful, to slap people on the back, to run with the college boat, though that is very pleasant if it is done naturally. All that is wanted is to be accessible and quietly genial. And under such influences a young man may, without becoming

elderly, get to understand the older point of view.

The difficulty is that one acquires habits and mannerisms; one is crusty and gruff if interfered with. But, as Pater said, to acquire habits is failure in life. Of course, one must realise limitations, and learn in what regions one can be effective. But no one need be case-hardened, smoke-dried, angular. The worst of a University is that one sees men lingering on because they must earn a living, and there is nothing else that they can do; but for a human-hearted, good-humoured, and sensible man, a college life is a life where it is easy and pleasant to practise benevolence and kindliness, and where a small investment of trouble pays a large percentage of happiness. Indeed, surveying it impartially—as impartially as I can—such a life seems to hold within it perhaps the greatest possibilities of happiness that life can hold. To have leisure and a degree of simple stateliness assured; to live in a wholesome dignity; to have the society of the young and generous; to have lively and intelligent talk; to have the choice of society and solitude alike; to have one's working hours respected, and one's leisure hours solaced—is not this better than to drift into the so-called tide of professional success, with its dreary hours

of work, its conventional domestic background? No doubt the domestic background has its interests, its delights; but one must pay a price for everything, and I am more than willing to pay the price of celibacy for my independence.

The elderly Don in college rooms, interested in Greek particles, grumbling over his port wine, is a figure beloved by writers of fiction as a contrast to all that is brave, and bright, and wholesome in life. Could there be a more hopeless misconception? I do not know a single extant example of the species at the University. Personally, I have no love for Greek particles, and only a very moderate taste for port wine. But I do love, with all my heart, the grace of antiquity that mellows our crumbling courts, the old tradition of multifarious humanity that has century by century entwined itself with the very fabric of the place. I love the youthful spirit that flashes and brightens in every corner of the old courts, as the wallflower that rises spring by spring with its rich orange-tawny hue, its wild scent, on the tops of our mouldering walls. It is a gracious and beautiful life for all who love peace and reflection, strength and youth. It is not a life for fiery and dominant natures, eager to conquer, keen to impress; but it is a life for any one who believes that the best rewards

are not the brightest, who is willing humbly to lend a cheerful hand, to listen as well as to speak. It is a life for any one who has found that there is a world of tender, wistful, delicate emotions, subdued and soft impressions, in which it is peace to live; for one who has learned, however dimly, that wise and faithful love, quiet and patient hope, are the bread by which the spirit is nourished—that religion is not an intellectual or even an ecclesiastical thing, but a far-off and remote vision of the soul.

I know well the thoughts and hopes that I should desire to speak; but they are evasive, subtle things, and too often, like shy birds, will hardly let you approach them. But I would add that life has not been for me a dreamy thing, lived in soft fantastic reveries; indeed, it has been far the reverse. I have practised activity, I have mixed much with my fellows; I have taught, worked, organised, directed. I have watched men and boys; I have found infinite food for mirth, for interest, and even for grief. But I have grown to feel that the ambitions which we preach and the successes for which we prepare are very often nothing but a missing of the simple road, a troubled wandering among thorny by-paths and dark mountains. I have grown to believe that the one thing worth aim-

ing at is simplicity of heart and life; that one's relations with others should be direct and not diplomatic; that power leaves a bitter taste in the mouth; that meanness, and hardness, and coldness are the unforgivable sins; that conventionality is the mother of dreariness; that pleasure exists not in virtue of material conditions, but in the joyful heart; that the world is a very interesting and beautiful place; that congenial labour is the secret of happiness; and many other things which seem, as I write them down, to be dull and trite commonplaces, but are for me the bright jewels which I have found beside the way.

It is, then, from College Windows that I look forth. But even so, though on the one hand I look upon the green and sheltered garden, with its air of secluded recollection and repose, a place of quiet pacing to and fro, of sober and joyful musing; yet on another side I see the court, with all its fresh and shifting life, its swift interchange of study and activity; and on yet another side I can observe the street where the infinite pageant of humanity goes to and fro, a tide full of sound and foam, of business and laughter, and of sorrow, too, and sickness, and the funeral pomp of death.

This, then, is my point of view. I can truth-

fully say that it is not gloomy, and equally that it is not uproarious. I can boast of no deep philosophy, for I feel, like Dr. Johnson's simple friend Edwards, that, "I have tried, too, in my time, to be a philosopher, but—I don't know how—cheerfulness was always breaking in." Neither is it the point of view of a profound and erudite student, with a deep belief in the efficacy of useless knowledge. Neither am I a humorist, for I have loved beauty better than laughter; nor a sentimentalist, for I have abhorred a weak dalliance with personal emotions. It is hard, then, to say what I am; but it is my hope that this may emerge. My desire is but to converse with my readers, to speak as in a comfortable *tête-à-tête*, of experience, and hope, and patience. I have no wish to disguise the hard and ugly things of life; they are there, whether one disguises them or not; but I think that unless one is a professed psychologist or statistician, one gets little good by dwelling upon them. I have always believed that it is better to stimulate than to correct, to fortify rather than to punish, to help rather than to blame. If there is one attitude that I fear and hate more than another it is the attitude of the cynic. I believe with all my soul in romance: that is, in a certain high-hearted, eager dealing with life.

I think that one ought to expect to find things beautiful and people interesting, not to take delight in detecting meannesses and failures. And there is yet another class of temperament for which I have a deep detestation. I mean the assured, the positive, the Pharisaical temper, that believes itself to be impregnably in the right and its opponents indubitably in the wrong; the people who deal in axioms and certainties, who think that compromise is weak and originality vulgar. I detest authority in every form; I am a sincere republican. In literature, in art, in life, I think that the only conclusions worth coming to are one's own conclusions. If they march with the verdict of the connoisseurs, so much the better for the connoisseurs; if they do not so march, so much the better for oneself. Every one cannot admire and love everything; but let a man look at things fairly and without prejudice, and make his own selection, holding to it firmly, but not endeavouring to impose his taste upon others; defending, if needs be, his preferences, but making no claim to authority.

The time of my life that I consider to have been wasted, from the intellectual point of view, was the time when I tried, in a spirit of dumb loyalty, to admire all the things that were said to be admirable. Better spent was the time

when I was finding out that much that had received the stamp of the world's approval was not to be approved, at least by me; best of all was the time when I was learning to appraise the value of things to myself, and learning to love them for their own sake and mine.

Respect of a deferential and constitutional type is out of place in art and literature. It is a good enough guide to begin one's pilgrimage with, if one soon parts company from it. Rather one must learn to give honour where honour is due, to bow down in true reverence before all spirits that are noble and adorable, whether they wear crowns and bear titles of honour, or whether they are simple and unnoted persons, who wear no gold on their garments.

Sincerity and simplicity! if I could only say how I reverence them, how I desire to mould my life in accordance with them! And I would learn, too, swiftly to detect the living spirits, whether they be young or old, in which these great qualities reign.

For I believe that there is in life a great and guarded city, of which we may be worthy to be citizens. We may, if we are blest, be always of the happy number, by some kindly gift of God; but we may also, through misadventure and pain, through errors and blunders, learn the way

thither. And sometimes we discern the city afar off, with her radiant spires and towers, her walls of strength, her gates of pearl; and there may come a day, too, when we have found the way thither, and enter in; happy if we go no more out, but happy, too, even if we may not rest there, because we know that, however far we wander, there is always a hearth for us and welcoming smiles.

I speak in a parable, but those who are finding the way will understand me, however dimly; and those who have found the way, and seen a little of the glory of the place, will smile at the page and say: "So he, too, is of the city."

The city is known by many names, and wears different aspects to different hearts. But one thing is certain—that no one who has entered there is ever in any doubt again. He may wander far from the walls, he may visit it but rarely, but it stands there in peace and glory, the one true and real thing for him in mortal time and in whatever lies beyond.

II

ON GROWING OLDER

THE sun flares red behind leafless elms and battlemented towers as I come in from a lonely walk beside the river; above the chimney-tops hangs a thin veil of drifting smoke, blue in the golden light. The games in the Common are just coming to an end; a stream of long-coated spectators sets towards the town, mingled with the parti-coloured, muddied figures of the players. I have been strolling half the afternoon along the river bank, watching the boats passing up and down; hearing the shrill cries of coxes, the measured plash of oars, the rhythmical rattle of rowlocks, intermingled at intervals with the harsh grinding of the chain-ferries. Five-and-twenty years ago I was rowing here myself in one of these boats, and I do not wish to renew the experience. I cannot conceive why and in what moment of feeble good-nature or misapplied patriotism I ever consented to lend a hand. I was not a good oar, and did not

become a better one; I had no illusions about my performance, and any momentary complacency was generally sternly dispelled by the harsh criticism of the coach on the bank, when we rested for a moment to receive our meed of praise or blame. But though I have no sort of wish to repeat the process, to renew the slavery which I found frankly and consistently intolerable, I find myself looking on at the cheerful scene with an amusement in which mingles a shadow of pain, because I feel that I have parted with something, a certain buoyancy and elasticity of body, and perhaps spirit, of which I was not conscious at the time, but which I now realise that I must have possessed. It is with an admiration mingled with envy that I see these youthful, shapely figures, bare-necked and bare-kneed, swinging rhythmically past. I watch a brisk crew lift a boat out of the water by a boat-house; half of them duck underneath to get hold of the other side, and they march up the grating gravel in a solemn procession. I see a pair of cheerful young men, released from tubbing, execute a wild and inconsequent dance upon the water's edge; I see a solemn conference of deep import between a stroke and a coach. I see a neat, clean-limbed young man go airily up to a well-earned tea, without, I

hope, a care, or an anxiety in his mind, expecting and intending to spend an agreeable evening. "Oh, Jones of Trinity, oh, Smith of Queen's," I think to myself, "*tua si bona nôris!* Make the best of the good time, my boy, before you go off to the office, or the fourth-form room, or the country parish! Live virtuously, make honest friends, read the good old books, lay up a store of kindly recollections, of firelit rooms in venerable courts, of pleasant talks, of innocent festivities. Very fresh is the cool morning air, very fragrant is the newly-lighted bird's-eye, very lively is the clink of knives and forks, very keen is the savour of the roast beef that floats up to the dark rafters of the College Hall. But the days are short and the terms are few; and do not forget to be a sensible as well as a good-humoured young man!"

Thackeray, in a delightful ballad, invites a pretty page to wait till he comes to forty years: well, I have waited—indeed, I have somewhat overshot the mark—and to-day the sight of all this brisk life, going on just as it used to do, with the same *insouciance* and the same merriment, makes me wish to reflect, to gather up the fragments, to see if it is all loss, all declension, or whether there is something left, some strength in what remains behind.

I have a theory that one ought to grow older in a tranquil and appropriate way, that one ought to be perfectly contented with one's time of life, that amusements and pursuits ought to alter naturally and easily, and not be regretfully abandoned. One ought not to be dragged protesting from the scene, catching desperately at every doorway and balustrade; one should walk off smiling. It is easier said than done. It is not a pleasant moment when a man first recognises that he is out of place in the football field, that he cannot stoop with the old agility to pick up a skimming stroke to cover-point, that dancing is rather too heating to be decorous, that he cannot walk all day without undue somnolence after dinner, or rush off after a heavy meal without indigestion. These are sad moments which we all of us reach, but which are better laughed over than fretted over. And a man who, out of sheer inability to part from boyhood, clings desperately and with apoplectic puffings to these things is an essentially grotesque figure. To listen to young men discussing one of these my belated contemporaries, and to hear one enforcing on another the amusement to be gained from watching the old buffer's manœuvres, is a lesson against undue youthfulness. One can indeed give amusement without loss of dignity,

by being open to being induced to join in such things occasionally in an elderly way, without any attempt to disguise deficiencies. But that is the most that ought to be attempted. Perhaps the best way of all is to subside into the genial and interested looker-on, to be ready to applaud the game you cannot play, and to admire the dexterity you cannot rival.

What then, if any, are the gains that make up for the lack of youthful prowess? They are, I can contentedly say, many and great. In the first place, there is the loss of a quality which is productive of an extraordinary amount of pain among the young, the quality of self-consciousness. How often was one's peace of mind ruined by *gaucherie*, by shyness, by the painful consciousness of having nothing to say, and the still more painful consciousness of having said the wrong thing in the wrong way! Of course, it was all immensely exaggerated. If one went into chapel, for instance, with a straw hat, which one had forgotten to remove, over a surplice, one had the feeling for several days that it was written in letters of fire on every wall. I was myself an ardent conversationalist in early years, and, with the charming omniscience of youth, fancied that my opinion was far better worth having than the opinions of Dons encrusted with pedantry and

prejudice. But if I found myself in the society of these petrified persons, by the time that I had composed a suitable remark, the slender opening had already closed, and my contribution was either not uttered at all, or hopelessly belated in its appearance. Or some deep generalisation drawn from the dark backward of my vast experience would be produced, and either ruthlessly ignored or contemptuously corrected by some unsympathetic elder of unyielding voice and formed opinions. And then there was the crushing sense, at the conclusion of one of these interviews, of having been put down as a tiresome and heavy young man. I fully believed in my own liveliness and sprightliness, but it seemed an impossible task to persuade my elders that these qualities were there. A good-natured, elderly friend used at times to rally me upon my shyness, and say that it all came from thinking too much about myself. It was as useless as if one told a man with a toothache that it was mere self-absorption that made him suffer. For I have no doubt that the disease of self-consciousness is incident to intelligent youth. Marie Bashkirtseff, in the terrible self-revealing journals which she wrote, describes a visit that she paid to some one who had expressed an interest in her and a desire to see her. She

says that as she passed the threshold of the room she breathed a prayer, "O God, make me worth seeing!" How often used one to desire to make an impression, to make oneself felt and appreciated!

Well, all that uneasy craving has left me. I no longer have any particular desire for or expectation of being impressive. One likes, of course, to feel fresh and lively; but whereas in the old days I used to enter a circle with the intention of endeavouring to be felt, of giving pleasure and interest, I now go in the humble hope of receiving either. The result is that, having got rid to a great extent of this pompous and self-regarding attitude of mind, I not only find myself more at ease, but I also find other people infinitely more interesting. Instead of laying one's frigate alongside of another craft with the intention of conducting a boarding expedition, one pays a genial visit by means of the long-boat with all the circumstance of courtesy and amiability. Instead of desiring to make conquests, I am glad enough to be tolerated. I dare, too, to say what I think, not alert for any symptoms of contradiction, but fully aware that my own point of view is but one of many, and quite prepared to revise it. In the old days I demanded agreement; I am now amused by divergence. In the old days I

desired to convince; I am now only too thankful to be convinced of error and ignorance. I now no longer shrink from saying that I know nothing of a subject; in old days I used to make a pretence of omniscience, and had to submit irritably to being tamely unmasked. It seems to me that I must have been an unpleasant young man enough, but I humbly hope that I was not so disagreeable as might appear.

Another privilege of advancing years is the decreasing tyranny of convention. I used to desire to do the right thing, to know the right people, to play the right games. I did not reflect whether it was worth the sacrifice of personal interest; it was all-important to be in the swim. Very gradually I discovered that other people troubled their heads very little about what one did; that the right people were often the most tiresome and the most conventional, and that the only games which were worth playing were the games which one enjoyed. I used to undergo miseries in staying at uncongenial houses, in accepting shooting invitations when I could not shoot, in going to dances because the people whom I knew were going. Of course one has plenty of disagreeable duties to perform in any case; but I discovered gradually that to adopt the principle of doing disagreeable things

which were supposed to be amusing and agreeable was to misunderstand the whole situation. Now, if I am asked to stay at a tiresome house, I refuse; I decline invitations to garden parties and public dinners and dances, because I know that they will bore me; and as to games, I never play them if I can help, because I find that they do not entertain me. Of course there are occasions when one is wanted to fill a gap, and then it is the duty of a Christian and a gentleman to conform, and to do it with a good grace. Again, I am not at the mercy of small prejudices, as I used to be. As a young man, if I disliked the cut of a person's whiskers or the fashion of his clothes, if I considered his manner to be abrupt or unpleasing, if I was not interested in his subjects, I set him down as an impossible person, and made no further attempt to form acquaintance.

Now I know that these are superficial things, and that a kind heart and an interesting personality are not inconsistent with boots of a grotesque shape and even with mutton-chop whiskers. In fact, I think that small oddities and differences have grown to have a distinct value, and form a pleasing variety. If a person's manner is unattractive, I often find that it is nothing more than a shyness or an awkward-

ness which disappears the moment that familiarity is established. My standard is, in fact, lower, and I am more tolerant. I am not, I confess, wholly tolerant, but my intolerance is reserved for qualities and not for externals. I still fly swiftly from long-winded, pompous, and contemptuous persons; but if their company is unavoidable, I have at least learnt to hold my tongue. The other day I was at a country-house where an old and extremely tiresome General laid down the law on the subject of the Mutiny, where he had fought as a youthful subaltern. I was pretty sure that he was making the most grotesque misstatements, but I was not in a position to contradict them. Next the General was a courteous, weary old gentleman, who sate with his finger-tips pressed together, smiling and nodding at intervals. Half-an-hour later we were lighting our candles. The General strode fiercely up to bed, leaving a company of yawning and dispirited men behind. The old gentleman came up to me and, as he took a light, said with an inclination of his head in the direction of the parting figure, "The poor General is a good deal misinformed. I didn't choose to say anything, but I know something about the subject, because I was private secretary to the Secretary for War."

That was the right attitude, I thought, for the gentlemanly philosopher; and I have learnt from my old friend the lesson not to choose to say anything if a turbulent and pompous person lays down the law on subjects with which I happen to be acquainted.

Again, there is another gain that results from advancing years. I think it is true that there were sharper ecstasies in youth, keener perceptions, more passionate thrills; but then the mind also dipped more swiftly and helplessly into discouragement, dreariness, and despair. I do not think that life is so rapturous, but it certainly is vastly more interesting. When I was young there were an abundance of things about which I did not care. I was all for poetry and art; I found history tedious, science tiresome, politics insupportable. Now I may thankfully say it is wholly different. The time of youth was the opening to me of many doors of life. Sometimes a door opened upon a mysterious and wonderful place, an enchanted forest, a solemn avenue, a sleeping glade; often, too, it opened into some dusty work-a-day place, full of bushy forms bent over intolerable tasks, whizzing wheels, dark gleaming machinery, the din of the factory and the workshop. Sometimes, too, a door would open into a bare and melancholy place, a hill-

side strewn with stones, an interminable plain of sand; worst of all, a place would sometimes be revealed which was full of suffering, anguish, and hopeless woe, shadowed with fears and sins. From such prospects I turned with groans unutterable; but the air of the accursed place would hang about me for days. These surprises, these strange surmises, crowded in fast upon me. How different the world was from what the careless forecast of boyhood had pictured it! How strange, how beautiful, and yet how terrible! As life went on the beauty increased, and a calmer, quieter beauty made itself revealed; in youth I looked for strange, impressive, haunted beauties, things that might deeply stir and move; but year by year a simpler, sweeter, healthier kind of beauty made itself felt; such beauty as lies on the bare, lightly washed, faintly tinted hillside of winter, all delicate greens and browns, so far removed from the rich summer luxuriance, and yet so austere, so pure. I grew to love different books too. In youth one demanded a generous glow, a fire of passion, a strongly tinged current of emotion; but by degrees came the love of sober, subdued reflection, a cooler world in which, if one could not rest, one might at least travel equably and gladly, with a far wider range of experience, a larger, if a fainter, hope.

I grew to demand less of the world, less of Nature, less of people; and behold, a whole range of subtler and gentler emotions came into sight, like the blue hills of the distance, pure and low. The whole movement of the world, past and present, became intelligible and dear. I saw the humanity that lies behind political and constitutional questions, the strong, simple forces that move like a steady stream behind the froth and foam of personality. If in youth I believed that personality and influence could sway and mould the world, in later years I have come to see that the strongest and fiercest characters are only the river-wrack, the broken boughs, the torn grasses that whirl and spin in the tongue of the creeping flood, and that there is a dim resistless force behind them that marches on unheeding and drives them in the forefront of the inundation. Things that had seemed drearily theoretical, dry, axiomatic, platitudinal, showed themselves to be great generalisations from a torrent of human effort and mortal endeavour. And thus all the mass of detail and human relation that had been rudely set aside by the insolent prejudices of youth under the generic name of business, came slowly to have an intense and living significance. I cannot trace the process in detail; but I became aware of the fulness,

the energy, the matchless interest of the world, and the vitality of a hundred thoughts that had seemed to me the dreariest abstractions.

Then, too, the greatest gain of all, there comes a sort of patience. In youth mistakes seemed irreparable, calamities intolerable, ambitions realisable, disappointments unbearable. An anxiety hung like a dark impenetrable cloud, a disappointment poisoned the springs of life. But now I have learned that mistakes can often be set right, that anxieties fade, that calamities have sometimes a compensating joy, that an ambition realised is not always pleasurable, that a disappointment is often of itself a great incentive to try again. One learns to look over troubles, instead of looking into them; one learns that hope is more unconquerable than grief. And so there flows into the gap the certainty that one can make more of misadventures, of unpromising people, of painful experiences, than one had ever hoped. It may not be, nay, it is not, so eager, so full-blooded a spirit; but it is a serener, a more interesting, a happier outlook.

And so, like Robinson Crusoe on his island, striking a balance of my advantages and disadvantages, I am inclined to think that the good points predominate. Of course there still remains the intensely human instinct, which sur-

vives all the lectures of moralists, the desire to eat one's cake and also to have it. One wants to keep the gains of middle life and not to part with the glow of youth. "The tragedy of growing old," says a brilliant writer, "is the remaining young;" that is to say, that the spirit does not age as fast as the body. The sorrows of life lie in the imagination, in the power to recall the good days that have been and the old sprightly feelings; and in the power, too, to forecast the slow overshadowing and decay of age. But Lord Beaconsfield once said that the worst evil one has to endure is the anticipation of the calamities that do not happen; and I am sure that the thing to aim at is to live as far as possible in the day and for the day. I do not mean in an epicurean fashion, by taking prodigally all the pleasure that one can get, like a spendthrift of the happiness that is meant to last a lifetime, but in the spirit of Newman's hymn—

"I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me."

Even now I find that I am gaining a certain power, instinctively, I suppose, in making the most of the day and hour. In old days, if I had a disagreeable engagement ahead of me, something to which I looked forward with

anxiety or dislike, I used to find that it poisoned my cup. Now it is beginning to be the other way; and I find myself with a heightened sense of pleasure in the quiet and peaceful days that have to intervene before the fateful morning dawns. I used to awake in the morning on the days that were still my own before the day which I dreaded, and begin, in that agitated mood which used to accompany the return of consciousness after sleep, when the mind is alert but unbalanced, to anticipate the thing I feared, and feel that I could not face it. Now I tend to awake and say to myself, "Well, at any rate I have still to-day in my own hands;" and then the very day itself has an increased value from the feeling that the uncomfortable experience lies ahead. I suppose that is the secret of the placid enjoyment which the very old so often display. They seem so near the dark gate, and yet so entirely indifferent to the thought of it; so absorbed in little leisurely trifles, happy with a childlike happiness.

And thus I went slowly back to College in that gathering gloom that seldom fails to bring a certain peace to the mind. The porter sate, with his feet on the fender, in his comfortable den, reading a paper. The lights were beginning to appear in the court, and the

firelight flickered briskly upon walls hung with all the pleasant signs of youthful life, the groups, the family photographs, the suspended oar, the cap of glory. So when I entered my book-lined rooms, and heard the kettle sing its comfortable song on the hearth, and reflected that I had a few letters to write, an interesting book to turn over, a pleasant Hall dinner to look forward to, and that, after a space of talk, an undergraduate or two were coming to talk over a leisurely piece of work, an essay or a paper, I was more than ever inclined to acquiesce in my disabilities, to purr like an elderly cat, and to feel that while I had the priceless boon of leisure, set in a framework of small duties, there was much to be said for life, and that I was a poor creature if I could not be soberly content.

Of course I know that I have missed the nearer ties of life, the hearth, the home, the companionship of a wife, the joys and interests of growing girls and boys. But if a man is fatherly and kind-hearted, he will find plenty of young men who are responsive to a paternal interest, and intensely grateful for the good-humoured care of one who will listen to their troubles, their difficulties, and their dreams. I have two or three young friends who tell me what they are doing, and what they hope to do;

I have many correspondents who were friends of mine as boys, who tell me from time to time how it goes with them in the bigger world, and who like in return to hear something of my own doings.

And so I sit, while the clock on the mantelpiece ticks out the pleasant minutes, and the fire winks and crumbles on the hearth, till the old gyp comes tapping at the door to learn my intentions for the evening; and then, again, I pass out into the court, the lighted windows of the Hall gleam with the ancient armorial glass, from staircase after staircase come troops of alert, gowned figures, while overhead, above all the pleasant stir and murmur of life, hang in the dark sky the unchanging stars.

III

BOOKS

THE one room in my College which I always enter with a certain sense of desolation and sadness is the College library. There used to be a story in my days at Cambridge of a book-collecting Don who was fond of discoursing in public of the various crosses he had to bear. He was lamenting one day in Hall the unwieldy size of his library. "I really don't know what to do with my books," he said, and looked round for sympathy. "Why not read them?" said a sharp and caustic Fellow opposite. It may be thought that I am in need of the same advice, but it is not the case. There are, indeed, many books in our library; but most of them, as D. G. Rossetti used to say in his childhood of his father's learned volumes, are "no good for reading." The books of the College library are delightful, indeed, to look at; rows upon rows of big irregular volumes, with tarnished tooling and

faded gilding on the sun-scorched backs. What are they? old editions of classics, old volumes of controversial divinity, folios of the Fathers, topographical treatises, cumbrous philosophers, pamphlets from which, like dry ashes, the heat of the fire that warmed them once has fled. Take one down: it is an agreeable sight enough; there is a gentle scent of antiquity; the bumpy page crackles faintly; the big irregular print meets the eye with a pleasant and leisurely mellowness. But what do they tell one? Very little, alas! that one need know, very much which it would be a positive mistake to believe. That is the worst of erudition—that the next scholar sucks the few drops of honey that you have accumulated, sets right your blunders, and you are superseded. You have handed on the torch, perhaps, and even trimmed it. Your errors, your patient explanations, were a necessary step in the progress of knowledge; but even now the procession has turned the corner, and is out of sight.

Yet even here, it pleases me to think, some mute and unsuspected treasure may lurk unknown. In a room like this, for over a couple of centuries, stood on one of the shelves an old rudely bound volume of blank paper, the pages covered with a curious straggling cipher;

no one paid any heed to it, no one tried to spell its secrets. But the day came when a Fellow who was both inquisitive and leisurely took up the old volume, and formed a resolve to decipher it. Through many baffling delays, through many patient windings, he carried his purpose out; and the result was a celebrated Day-book, which cast much light upon the social conditions of a past age, as well as revealed one of the most simple and genial personalities that ever marched blithely through the pages of a Diary.

But, in these days of cheap print and nasty paper, with a central library into which pours the annual cataract of literature, these little ancient libraries have no use left, save as repositories or store-rooms. They belong to the days when books were few and expensive; when few persons could acquire a library of their own; when lecturers accumulated knowledge that was not the property of the world; when notes were laboriously copied and handed on; when one of the joys of learning was the consciousness of possessing secrets not known to other men. An ancient Dean of Christ Church is said to have given three reasons for the study of Greek: the first was that it enabled you to read the words of the Saviour in the original

tongue; the second, that it gave you a proper contempt for those who were ignorant of it; and the third was that it led to situations of emolument. What a rich aroma hangs about this judgment! The first reason is probably erroneous, the second is un-Christian, and the third is a gross motive which would equally apply to any professional training whatsoever.

Well, the knowledge of Greek, except for the schoolmaster and the clergyman, has not now the same obvious commercial value. Knowledge is more diffused, more accessible. It is no longer thought to be a secret, precious, rather terrible possession; the possessor is no longer venerated and revered; on the contrary, a learned man is rather considered likely to be tiresome. Old folios have, indeed, become merely the stock-in-trade of the illustrators of sensational novels. Who does not know the absurd old man, with white silky hair, velvet skull-cap, and venerable appearance, who sits reading a folio at an oak table, and who turns out to be the villain of the piece, a mine of secret and unsuccessful wickedness? But no one in real life reads a folio now, because anything that is worth reprinting, as well as a good deal that is not, is reprinted in convenient form, if not in England, at least in Germany.

And the result of it is that these College libraries are almost wholly unvisited. It seems a pity, but it also seems inevitable. I wish that some use could be devised for them, for these old books make at all events a very dignified and pleasant background, and the fragrance of well-warmed old leather is a delicate thing. But they are not even good places for working in, now that one has one's own books and one's own reading-chair. Moreover, if they were kept up to date, which would in itself be an expensive thing, there would come in the eternal difficulty of where to put the old books, which no one would have the heart to destroy.

Perhaps the best thing for a library like this would be not to attempt to buy books, but to subscribe like a club to a circulating library, and to let a certain number of new volumes flow through the place and lie upon the tables for a time. But, on the other hand, here in the University there seems to be little time for general reading; and indeed it is a great problem, as life goes on, as duties grow more defined, and as one becomes more and more conscious of the shortness of life, what the duty of a cultivated and open-minded man is with regard to general reading. I am

inclined to think that as one grows older one may read less; it is impossible to keep up with the vast output of literature, and it is hard enough to find time to follow even the one or two branches in which one is specially interested. Almost the only books which, I think, it is a duty to read, are the lives of great contemporaries; one gets thus to have an idea of what is going on in the world, and to realise it from different points of view. New fiction, new poetry, new travels are very hard to peruse diligently. The effort, I confess, of beginning a new novel, of making acquaintance with an unfamiliar scene, of getting the individualities of a fresh group of people into one's head, is becoming every year harder for me; but there are still one or two authors of fiction for whom I have a predilection, and whose works I look out for. New poetry demands an even greater effort; and as to travels, they are written so much in the journalistic style, and consist so much of the meals our traveller obtains at wayside stations, of conversations with obviously reticent and even unintelligent persons; they have so many photogravures of places that are exactly like other places, and of complacent people in grotesque costumes, like supers in a play, that one feels

the whole thing to be hopelessly superficial and unreal. Imagine a journalistic foreigner visiting the University, lunching at the station refreshment-room, hurrying to half-a-dozen of the best known colleges, driving in a tram through the main thoroughfares, looking on at a football match, interviewing a Town Councillor, and being presented to the Vice-Chancellor —what would be the profit of such a record as he could give us? What would he have seen of the quiet daily life, the interests, the home-current of the place? The only books of travel worth reading are those where a person has settled deliberately in an unknown place, really lived the life of the people, and penetrated the secret of the landscape and the buildings.

I wish very much that there was a really good literary paper, with an editor of catholic tastes, and half-a-dozen stimulating specialists on the staff, whose duty would be to read the books that came out, each in his own line, write reviews of appreciation and not of contemptuous fault-finding, let feeble books alone, and make it their business to tell ordinary people what to read, not saving them the trouble of reading the books that are worth reading, but sparing them the task of glancing at a good many books that are not worth reading. Literary papers, as a rule, either review

a book with hopeless rapidity, or tend to lag behind too much. It would be of the essence of such a paper as I have described, that there should be no delay about telling one what to look out for, and at the same time that the reviews should be deliberate and careful.

But I think that as one grows older one may take out a licence, so to speak, to read less. One may go back to the old restful books, where one knows the characters well, hear the old remarks, survey the same scenes. One may meditate more upon one's stores, stroll about more, just looking at life, seeing the quiet things that are happening, and beaming through one's spectacles. One ought to have amassed, as life goes on and the shadows lengthen, a good deal of material for reflection. And, after all, reading is not in itself a virtue; it is only one way of passing the time; talking is another way, watching things another. Bacon says that reading makes a full man; well, I cannot help thinking that many people are full to the brim when they reach the age of forty, and that much which they afterwards put into the overcharged vase merely drips and slobbers uncomfortably down the side and foot.

The thing to determine then, as one's brain hardens or softens, is what the object of reading is. It is not, I venture to think, what used to be

called the pursuit of knowledge. Of course, if a man is a professional teacher or a professional writer, he must read for professional purposes, just as a coral insect must eat to enable it to secrete the substances out of which it builds its branching house. But I am not here speaking of professional studies, but of general reading. I suppose that there are three motives for reading —the first, purely pleasurable; the second, intellectual; the third, what may be called ethical. As to the first, a man who reads at all, reads just as he eats, sleeps, and takes exercise, because he likes it; and that is probably the best reason that can be given for the practice. It is an innocent mode of passing the time, it takes one out of oneself, it is amusing. Of course, it can be carried to an excess; and a man may become a mere book-eater, as a man may become an opium-eater. I used at one time to go and stay with an old friend, a clergyman in a remote part of England. He was a bachelor and fairly well off. He did not care about exercise or his garden, and he had no taste for general society. He subscribed to the London Library and to a lending library in the little town where he lived, and he bought, too, a good many books. He must have spent, I used to calculate, about ten hours of the twenty-four in reading. He seemed to me to have read every-

thing, old and new books alike, and he had an astonishing memory; anything that he put into his mind remained there exactly as fresh and clear as when he laid it away, so that he never needed to read a book twice. If he had lived at a University he would have been a useful man; if one wanted to know what books to read in any line, one had only to pick his brains. He could give one a list of authorities on almost every subject. But in his country parish he was entirely thrown away. He had not the least desire to make anything of his stores, or to write. He had not the art of expression, and he was a distinctly tiresome talker. His idea of conversation was to ask you whether you had read a number of modern novels. If he found one that you had not read, he sketched the plot in an intolerably prolix manner, so that it was practically impossible to fix the mind on what he was saying. He seemed to have no preferences in literature whatever; his one desire was to read everything that came out, and his only idea of a holiday was to go up to London and get lists of books from a bookseller. That is, of course, an extreme case; and I cannot help feeling that he would have been nearly as usefully employed if he had confined himself to counting the number of words in the books he read. But, after all, he was in-

terested and amused, and a perfectly contented man.

As to the intellectual motive for reading, it hardly needs discussing; the object is to get clear conceptions, to arrive at a critical sense of what is good in literature, to have a knowledge of events and tendencies of thought, to take a just view of history and of great personalities; not to be at the mercy of theorists, but to be able to correct a faulty bias by having a large and wide view of the progress of events and the development of thought. One who reads from this point of view will generally find some particular line which he tends to follow, some special region of the mind where he is desirous to know all that can be known; but he will, at the same time, wish to acquaint himself in a general way with other departments of thought, so that he may be interested in subjects in which he is not wholly well-informed, and be able to listen, even to ask intelligent questions, in matters with which he has no minute acquaintance. Such a man, if he steers clear of the contempt for indefinite views which is often the curse of men with clear and definite minds, makes the best kind of talker, stimulating and suggestive; his talk seems to open doors into gardens and corridors of the house of thought; and others, whose knowledge is fragmentary, would

like to be at home, too, in that pleasant palace. But it is of the essence of such talk that it should be natural and attractive, not professional or didactic. People who are not used to Universities tend to believe that academical persons are invariably formidable. They think of them as possessed of vast stores of precise knowledge, and actuated by a merciless desire to detect and to ridicule deficiencies of attainment among unprofessional people. Of course, there are people of this type to be found at a University, just as in all other professions it is possible to find uncharitable specialists who despise persons of hazy and leisurely views. But my own impression is that it is a rare type among University Dons; I think that it is far commoner at the University to meet men of great attainments combined with sincere humility and charity, for the simple reason that the most erudite specialist at a University becomes aware both of the wide diversity of knowledge and of his own limitations as well.

Personally, direct bookish talk is my abomination. A knowledge of books ought to give a man a delicate allusiveness, an aptitude for pointed quotation. A book ought to be only incidentally, not anatomically, discussed; and I am pleased to be able to think that there is a good deal of this allusive talk at the University, and that the only

reason that there is not more is that professional demands are so insistent, and work so thorough, that academical persons cannot keep up their general reading as they would like to do.

And then we come to what I have called, for want of a better word, the ethical motive for reading; it might sound at first as if I meant that people ought to read improving books, but that is exactly what I do not mean. I have very strong opinions on this point, and hold that what I call the ethical motive for reading is the best of all—indeed the only true one. And yet I find a great difficulty in putting into words what is a very elusive and delicate thought. But my belief is this. As I make my slow pilgrimage through the world, a certain sense of beautiful mystery seems to gather and grow. I see that many people find the world dreary—and, indeed, there must be spaces of dreariness in it for us all—some find it interesting; some surprising; some find it entirely satisfactory. But those who find it satisfactory seem to me, as a rule, to be tough, coarse, healthy natures, who find success attractive and food digestible: who do not trouble their heads very much about other people, but go cheerfully and optimistically on their way, closing their eyes as far as possible to things painful and sorrowful, and getting all the pleasure they can out of material enjoyments.

Well, to speak very sincerely and humbly, such a life seems to me the worst kind of failure. It is the life that men were living in the days of Noah, and out of such lives comes nothing that is wise or useful or good. Such men leave the world as they found it, except for the fact that they have eaten a little way into it, like a mite into a cheese, and leave a track of decomposition behind them.

I do not know why so much that is hard and painful and sad is interwoven with our life here; but I see, or seem to see, that it is meant to be so interwoven. All the best and most beautiful flowers of character and thought seem to me to spring up in the track of suffering; and what is the most sorrowful of all mysteries, the mystery of death, the ceasing to be, the relinquishing of our hopes and dreams, the breaking of our dearest ties, becomes more solemn and awe-inspiring the nearer we advance to it.

I do not mean that we are to go and search for unhappiness; but, on the other hand, the only happiness worth seeking for is a happiness which takes all these dark things into account, looks them in the face, reads the secret of their dim eyes and set lips, dwells with them, and learns to be tranquil in their presence.

In this mood—and it is a mood which no thoughtful man can hope or ought to wish to

escape—reading becomes less and less a searching for instructive and impressive facts, and more and more a quest after wisdom and truth and emotion. More and more I feel the impenetrability of the mystery that surrounds us; the phenomena of nature, the discoveries of science, instead of raising the veil, seem only to make the problem more complex, more bizarre, more insoluble; the investigation of the laws of light, of electricity, of chemical action, of the causes of disease, the influence of heredity—all these things may minister to our convenience and our health, but they make the mind of God, the nature of the First Cause, an infinitely more mysterious and inconceivable problem.

But there still remains, inside, so to speak, of these astonishing facts, a whole range of intimate personal phenomena, of emotion, of relationship, of mental or spiritual conceptions, such as beauty, affection, righteousness, which seem to be an even nearer concern, even more vital to our happiness than the vast laws of which it is possible for men to be so unconscious, that centuries have rolled past without their being investigated.

And thus in such a mood reading becomes a patient tracing out of human emotion, human feeling, when confronted with the sorrows, the hopes, the motives, the sufferings which beckon us and threaten us on every side. One desires to

know what pure and wise and high-hearted natures have made of the problem; one desires to let the sense of beauty—that most spiritual of all pleasures—sink deeper into the heart; one desires to share the thoughts and hopes, the dreams and visions, in the strength of which the human spirit has risen superior to suffering and death.

And thus, as I say, the reading that is done in such a mood has little of precise acquisition or definite attainment about it; it is a desire rather to feed and console the spirit—to enter the region in which it seems better to wonder than to know, to aspire rather than to define, to hope rather than to be satisfied. A spirit which walks expectantly along this path grows to learn that the secret of such happiness as we can attain lies in simplicity and courage, in sincerity and loving-kindness; it grows more and more averse to material ambitions and mean aims; it more and more desires silence and recollection and contemplation. In this mood, the words of the wise fall like the tolling of sweet, grave bells upon the soul, the dreams of poets come like music heard at evening from the depth of some enchanted forest, wafted over a wide water; we know not what instrument it is whence the music wells, by what fingers swept, by what lips blown; but we know that there is some presence there that is sorrowful or glad, who has

power to translate his dream into the concord of sweet sounds. Such a mood need not withdraw us from life, from toil, from kindly relationships, from deep affections; but it will rather send us back to life with a renewed and joyful zest, with a desire to discern the true quality of beautiful things, of fair thoughts, of courageous hopes, of wise designs. It will make us tolerant and forgiving, patient with stubbornness and prejudice, simple in conduct, sincere in word, gentle in deed; with pity for weakness, with affection for the lonely and the desolate, with admiration for all that is noble and serene and strong.

Those who read in such a spirit will tend to resort more and more to large and wise and beautiful books, to press the sweetness out of old familiar thoughts, to look more for warmth and loftiness of feeling than for elaborate and artful expression. They will value more and more books that speak to the soul, rather than books that appeal to the ear and to the mind. They will realise that it is through wisdom and force and nobility that books retain their hold upon the hearts of men, and not by briskness and colour and epigram. A mind thus stored may have little grasp of facts, little garniture of paradox and jest; but it will be full of compassion and hope, of gentleness and joy. . . .

Well, this thought has taken me a long way from the College library, where the old books look somewhat pathetically from the shelves, like aged dogs wondering why no one takes them for a walk. Monuments of pathetic labour, tasks patiently fulfilled through slow hours! But yet I am sure that a great deal of joy went to the making of them, the joy of the old scholar who settled down soberly among his papers, and heard the silvery bell above him tell out the dear hours that, perhaps, he would have delayed if he could. Yes, the old books are a tender-hearted and a joyful company; the days slip past, the sunlight moves round the court, and steals warmly for an hour or two into the deserted room. Life—delightful life—spins merrily past; the perennial stream of youth flows on; and perhaps the best that the old books can do for us is to bid us cast back a wistful and loving thought into the past—a little gift of love for the old labourers who wrote so diligently in the forgotten hours, till the weary, failing hand laid down the familiar pen, and soon lay silent in the dust.

IV

SOCIABILITIES

I HAVE a friend here, an old friend, who, in refreshing contrast with the majority of the human race, possesses strongly marked characteristics. He knows exactly the sort of life that suits him, and exactly what he likes. He is not, as Mr. Enfield said, one of the fellows who go about doing what is called "good." But he contrives to give a great deal of happiness without having any programme. He is, in the first place, a *savant* with a great reputation; but he makes no parade of his work, and sits down to it because he likes it, as a hungry man may sit down to a pleasant meal. He is thus the most leisurely man that I know, while, at the same time, his output is amazing. His table is covered deep with books and papers; but he will work at a corner, if he is fortunate enough to find one; and, if not, he will make a kind of cutting in the mass, and work in the shade, with steep banks of stratified papers on either hand. He is always accessible, always ready

to help any one. The undergraduate, that shy bird in whose sight the net is so often spread in vain, even though it be baited with the priceless privilege of tea, tobacco, and the talk of a well-informed man, comes, in troops and companies, to see him. He is a man too with a deep vein of humour, and, what is far more rare, a keen vein of appreciation of the humour of others. He laughs as if he were amused, not like a man discharging a painful duty. It is true that he will not answer letters; but then his writing-paper is generally drowned deeper than plummet can sound; his pens are rusty, and his ink is of the consistency of tar; but he will always answer questions, with an incredible patience and sympathy, correcting one's mistakes in a genial and tentative way, as if a matter admitted of many opinions. If a man, for instance, maintains that the Norman Conquest took place in 1066 B.C., he will say that some historians put it more than two thousand years later, but that of course it is difficult to arrive at exact accuracy in these matters. Thus one never feels snubbed or snuffed out by him.

Well, for the purposes of my argument, I will call my friend Perry, though it is not his name; and having finished my introduction I will go on to my main story.

I took in to dinner the other night a beautiful

and accomplished lady, with whom it is always a pleasure to talk. The conversation turned upon Mr. Perry. She said with a graceful air of judgment that she had but one fault to find with him, and that was that he hated women. I hazarded a belief that he was shy, to which she replied with a dignified assurance that he was not shy; he was lazy.

Prudence and discretion forbade me to appeal against this decision; but I endeavoured to arrive at the principles that supported such a verdict. I gathered that Egeria considered that every one owed a certain duty to society; that people had no business to pick and choose, to cultivate the society of those who happened to please and interest them, and to eschew the society of those who bored and wearied them; that such a course was not fair to the uninteresting people, and so forth. But the point was that there was a duty involved, and that some sacrifice was required of virtuous people in the matter.

Egeria herself is certainly blameless in the matter: she diffuses sweetness and light in many tedious assemblies; she is true to her principles; but for all that I cannot agree with her on this point.

In the first place I cannot agree that sociability is a *duty* at all, and to conceive of it as such seems to me to misunderstand the whole situation. I

think that a man loses a great deal by being unsociable, and that for his own happiness he had better make an effort to see something of his fellows. All kinds of grumpinesses and morbidities arise from solitude; and a shy man ought to take occasional dips into society from a medicinal point of view, as a man should take a cold bath; even if he confers no pleasure on others by so doing, the mere sense, to a timid man, of having steered a moderately straight course through a social entertainment is in itself enlivening and invigorating, and gives the pleasing feeling of having escaped from a great peril. But the accusation of unsociability does not apply to Perry, whose doors are open day and night, and whose welcome is always perfectly sincere. Moreover, the frame of mind in which a man goes to a party, determined to confer pleasure and exercise influence, is a dangerously self-satisfied one. Society is, after all, a recreation and a delight, and ought to be sought for with pleasurable motives, not with a consciousness of rectitude and justice.

My own belief is that every one has a perfect right to choose his own circle, and to make it large or small as he desires. It is a monstrous thing to hold that, if an agreeable or desirable person comes to a place, one has but to leave a piece of pasteboard at his door to entail upon him

the duty of coming round till he finds one at home, and of disporting himself gingerly, like a dancing bear among the teacups. A card ought to be a species of charity, left on solitary strangers, to give them the chance of coming, if they like, to see the leaver of it, or as a preliminary to a real invitation. It ought to be a ticket of admission, which a man may use or not as he likes, not a legal summons. That any one should return a call should be a compliment and an honour, not regarded as the mere discharging of a compulsory duty.

I have heard fair ladies complain of the boredom they endured at tea-parties; they speak of themselves as the martyrs and victims of a sense of duty. If such people talked of the duty of visiting the sick and afflicted as a thing which their conception of Christian love entailed upon them, which they performed, reluctantly and unwillingly, from a sense of obligation, I should respect them deeply and profoundly. But I have not often found that the people who complain most of their social duties, and who discharge them most sedulously, complain because such duties interrupt a course of Christian beneficence. It is, indeed, rather the other way; it is generally true that those who see a good deal of society (from a sense of duty) and find it dull, are the people who have no particular interests or pursuits of their own.

There is less excuse in a University town than in any other for adopting this pompous and formal view of the duties of society, because there are very few unoccupied people in such a place. My own occupations, such as they are, fill the hours from breakfast to luncheon and from tea to dinner; men of sedentary lives, who do a good deal of brain-work, find an hour or two of exercise and fresh air a necessity in the afternoon. Indeed, a man who cares about his work, and who regards it as a primary duty, finds no occupation more dispiriting, more apt to unfit him for serious work, than pacing from house to house in the early afternoon, delivering a pack of visiting-cards, varied by a perfunctory conversation, seated at the edge of an easy-chair, on subjects of inconceivable triviality. Of course there are men so constituted that they find this pastime a relief and a pleasure; but their felicity of temperament ought not to be made into a rule for serious-minded men. The only social institution which might really prove beneficial in a University is an informal evening salon. If people might drop in uninvited, in evening dress or not, as was convenient, from nine to ten in the evening, at a pleasant house, it would be a rational practice; but few such experiments seem ever to be tried.

Moreover, the one thing that is fatal to all

spontaneous social enjoyment is that the guests should, like the maimed and blind in the parable, be compelled to come in. The frame of mind of an eminent Cabinet Minister whom I once accompanied to an evening party rises before my mind. He was in deep depression at having to go; and when I ventured to ask his motive in going, he said, with an air of unutterable self-sacrifice, "I suppose that we ought sometimes to be ready to submit to the tortures we inflict on others." Imagine a circle of guests assembled in such a frame of mind, and it would seem that one had all the materials for a thoroughly pleasant party.

I was lately taken by a friend, with whom I was staying in the country, to a garden party. I confess that I think it would be hard to conceive circumstances less favourable to personal enjoyment. The day was hot, and I was uncomfortably dressed. I found myself first in a hot room, where the host and hostess were engaged in what is called receiving. A stream of pale, perspiring people moved slowly through, some of them frankly miserable, some with an air of false geniality, which deceived no one, written upon their faces. "So pleasant to see so many friends!" "What a delightful day you have got for your party!" Such ineptitudes were the current coin of the

market. I passed on into another room where refreshment, of a nature that I did not want, was sadly accepted. And I then passed out into the open air; the garden was disagreeably crowded; there was "a din of doubtful talk," as Rossetti says. The sun beat down dizzily on my streaming brow. I joined group after group, where the conversation was all of the same easy and stimulating character, until I felt sick and faint (though of robust constitution) with the "mazes of heat and sound" in which my life seemed "turning, turning," like the life of the heroine of "Requiescat." I declare that such a performance is the sort of thing that I should expect to find in hell, even down to the burning marl, as Milton says. I got away dizzy, unstrung, unfit for life, with that terrible sense of fatigue unaccompanied by wholesome tiredness, that comes of standing in hot buzzing places. I had heard not a single word that amused or interested me; and yet there were plenty of people present with whom I should have enjoyed a leisurely talk, to whom I felt inclined to say, in the words of Prince Henry to Poins, "Prithee, Ned, come out of this fat room, and lend me thy hand to laugh a little!" But as I went away, I pondered sadly upon the almost inconceivable nature of the motive which could lead people to behave as I had seen them be-

having, and resolutely to label it pleasure. I suppose that, as a matter of fact, many persons find stir, and movement, and the presence of a crowd an agreeable stimulus. I imagine that people are divided into those who, if they see a crowd of human beings in a field, have a desire to join them, and those who, at the same sight, long to fly swiftly to the uttermost ends of the earth. I am of the latter temperament; and I cannot believe that there is any duty which should lead me to resist the impulse as a temptation to evil. But the truth is that sociable people, like liturgical people, require, for the full satisfaction of their instincts, that a certain number of other persons should be present at the ceremonies which they affect, and that all should be occupied in the same way. It is of little moment to the originators of the ceremony whether those present are there willingly or unwillingly; and thus the only resource of their victims is to go out on strike; so far from thinking it a duty to be present at social or religious functions, in order that my sociable or liturgical friends should have a suitable background for their pleasures, I think it a solemn duty to resist to the uttermost this false and vexatious theory of society and religion!

I suppose, too, that inveterate talkers and dis-

coursers require an audience who should listen meekly and admiringly, and not interrupt. I have friends who are afflicted with this taste to such an extent, who are so determined to hold the talk in their own hands, that I declare they might as well have a company of stuffed seals to sit down to dinner with, as a circle of living and breathing men. But I do not think it right, or at all events necessary, in the interests of human kindliness, that I should victimise myself so for a man's pleasure. Neither do I think it necessary that I should attend a ceremony where I neither get nor give anything of the nature of pleasure, simply in order to conform to a social rule, invented and propagated by those who happen to enjoy such gatherings.

I remember being much struck by an artless reminiscence of an undergraduate, quoted in the Memoirs of a certain distinguished academical personage, who was fond of inviting young men to share his hospitality for experimental reasons. I cannot recollect the exact words, but the undergraduate wrote of his celebrated entertainer somewhat to the following effect: "He asked me to sit down, so I sate down; he asked me to eat an apple, so I ate it. He asked me to take a glass of wine, so I poured one out, and drank it. I am told that he tries to get you to talk

so that he may see the kind of fellow you are; but I didn't want him to know the kind of fellow I was, so I didn't talk; and presently I went away." I think that this species of retaliation is perfectly fair in the case of experimental entertainments. Social gatherings must be conducted on a basis of perfect equality, and the idea of duty in connection with them is a bugbear invented in the interests of those who are greedy of society, and not in a position to contribute any pleasure to a social gathering.

It might be inferred from the above considerations that I am an inveterately unsociable person; but such is not the case. I am extremely gregarious at the right time and place. I love to spend a large part of the day alone; I think that a perfect day consists in a solitary breakfast and a solitary morning; a single companion for luncheon and exercise; again some solitary hours; but then I love to dine in company and, if possible, to spend the rest of the evening with two or three congenial persons. But more and more, as life goes on, do I find the mixed company tiresome, and the *tête-à-tête* delightful. The only amusement of society is the getting to know what other people really think and feel: what amuses them, what pleases them, what shocks them; what they like and what they

loathe; what they tolerate and what they condemn. A dinner-party is agreeable, principally because one is absolutely tied down to make the best of two people. Very few English people have the art of conversing unaffectedly and sincerely before a circle; when one does come across it, it is a rare and beautiful art, like singing, or oratory. But the presence of such an *improvisatore* is the only thing that makes a circle tolerable. On the other hand, a great many English people have the art of *tête-à-tête* talking; and I can honestly say that I have very seldom been brought into close relations with an individual without finding an unsuspected depth and width of interest in the companionship.

But in any case the whole thing is a mere question of pleasure; and I return to my thesis, which is that the only possible theory is for every one to find and create the kind of society that he or she may like. Depend upon it, congenial society is the only kind of society to, and in which, any one will give his best. If people like the society of the restaurant, the club, the drawing-room, the dining-room, the open air, the cricket-field, the moor, the golf-course, in the name of pleasure and common sense let them have it; but to condemn people,

by brandishing the fiery sword of duty over their heads, to attend uncongenial gatherings seems to me to be both absurd and unjust.

The case of my friend Perry is, I must admit, complicated by the fact that he does add greatly to the happiness of any circle of which he is a member ; he is an admirable listener and a sympathetic talker. But if Egeria desires to make a Numa of him, and to inspire him with her own gentle wisdom, let her convince him quietly that he does owe a duty to society, and not censure him before his friends. If Egeria, in her own inimitable way, would say to him that the lives of academical ladies were apt to be dull, and that it was a matter of graceful chivalry for him to brighten the horizon, why, Perry could not resist her. But chivalry is a thing which must be courteously and generously conceded, and must never be pettishly claimed ; and indeed I do not want Perry interfered with in this matter : he fills a very peculiar niche, he is a lodestar to enthusiastic undergraduates : he is the joy of sober common-rooms. I wish with all my heart that the *convenances* of life permitted Egeria herself to stray into those book-lined rooms, dim with tobacco-smoke, to warble and sing to the accompaniment of Perry's cracked piano, to take her place among the casual com-

pany. But as Egeria cannot go to Perry, and as Perry will not go to Egeria, they must respect each other from a distance, and do their best alone.

And, after all, simple, sincere, and kindly persons are apt to find, as Stevenson wisely said, their circle ready-made. The only people who cannot get the friends and companions they want are those who petulantly claim attention; and the worst error of all consists in mistaking the gentle pleasures of life, such as society and intercourse, for the duties of life, and of codifying and formalising them. For myself, I wish with all my heart that I had Perry's power; I wish that those throngs of young men would feel impelled to come in and talk to me, easily and simply. I have, it is true, several faithful friends, but very few of them will come except in response to a definite invitation; and really, if they do not want to come, I do not at all wish to force them to do so. It might amuse me; but if it amused them, they would come: as they do not come, I am quite ready to conclude that it does not amuse them. I am as conscious as every one else of the exquisitely stimulating and entertaining character of my own talk; it constantly pains me that so few people take advantage of their opportunities of visiting the healing fount. But

the fact is incontestable that my talents are not appreciated at their right value; and I must be content with such slender encouragement as I receive. In vain do I purchase choice brands of cigars and cigarettes, and load my side-table with the best Scotch whisky. Not even with that solace will the vagrant undergraduate consent to be douched under the stream of my suggestive conversation.

A humorous friend of mine, Tipton by name, an official of a neighbouring college, told me that he held receptions of undergraduates on Sunday evenings. I believe that he is in reality a model host, full of resource and sprightliness, and that admission to his entertainments is eagerly coveted. But it pleases him to depreciate his own success. "Oh, yes," he said, in answer to my questions as to the art he practised, "a few of them come; one or two because they like me; some because they think there is going to be a row about attendance at chapel, and hope to mend matters; one or two because they like to stand well with the dons, when there is a chance of a fellowship; but the lowest motive of all," he went on, "was the motive which I heard from the lips of one on a summer evening, when my windows were all open, and I was just prepared to receive boarders; an in-

genuous friend of mine beneath said to another unoccupied youth, 'What do you think about doing a Tipper to-night?' To which the other replied, 'Well, yes, one ought to do one a term; let's go in at once and get it over.'"

V

CONVERSATION

I CANNOT help wishing sometimes that English people had more theories about conversation. Really good talk is one of the greatest pleasures there is, and yet how rarely one comes across it! There are a good many people among my acquaintance who on occasions are capable of talking well. But what they seem to lack is initiative, and deliberate purpose. If people would only look upon conversation in a more serious light, much would be gained. I do not of course mean—Heaven forbid!—that people should try to converse seriously; that results in the worst kind of dreariness, in feeling, as Stevenson said, that one has the brain of a sheep and the eyes of a boiled codfish. But I mean that the more seriously one takes an amusement, the more amusing it becomes. What I wish is that people would apply the same sort of seriousness to talk that they apply to golf and bridge; that they should desire to improve their game, brood over their

mistakes, try to do better. Why is it that so many people would think it priggish and effeminate to try to improve their talk, and yet think it manly and rational to try to shoot better? Of course it must be done with a natural zest and enjoyment, or it is useless. What a ghastly picture one gets of the old-fashioned talkers and wits, committing a number of subjects to memory, turning over a commonplace book for apposite anecdotes and jests, adding dates to those selected that they may not tell the same story again too soon, learning up a list of epigrams, stuck in a shaving-glass, when they are dressing for dinner, and then sallying forth primed to bursting with conversation! It is all very well to know beforehand the kind of line you would wish to take, but spontaneity is a necessary ingredient of talk, and to make up one's mind to get certain stories in, is to deprive talk of its fortuitous charm. When two celebrated talkers of the kind that I have described used to meet, the talk was nothing but a smart interchange of ancedotes. There is a story of Macaulay and some other great conversationalist getting into the swing at breakfast when staying, I think, with Lord Lansdowne. They drew their chairs to the fire, the rest of the company formed a circle round them, and listened meekly to the dialogue until luncheon. What an

appalling picture! One sympathises with Carlyle on the occasion when he was asked to dinner to meet a great talker, who poured forth a continuous flow of jest and anecdote until the meal was far advanced. Then came a lull; Carlyle laid down his knife and fork, and looking round with the famous "crucified" expression on his face, said in a voice of agonised entreaty, "For God's sake take me away, and put me in a room by myself, and give me a pipe of tobacco!" He felt, as I have felt on such occasions, an imperative need of silence and recollection and repose. Indeed, as he said on another occasion, of one of Coleridge's harangues, "to sit still and be pumped into is never an exhilarating process."

That species of talker is, however, practically extinct; though indeed I have met men whose idea of talk was a string of anecdotes, and who employed the reluctant intervals of silence imposed upon them by the desperate attempt of fellow-guests to join in the fun, in arranging the points of their next ancedote.

What seems to me so odd about a talker of that kind is the lack of any sense of justice about his talk. He presumably enjoys the exercise of speech, and it seems to me strange that it should not occur to him that others may like it too, and that he should not concede a certain

opportunity to others to have their say, if only in the interests of fair play. It is as though a gourmet's satisfaction in a good dinner were not complete unless he could prevent every one else from partaking of the food before them.

What is really most needed in social gatherings is a kind of moderator of the talk, an informal president. Many people, as I have said, are quite capable of talking interestingly, if they get a lead. The perfect moderator should have a large stock of subjects of general interest. He should, so to speak, kick-off. And then he should either feel, or at least artfully simulate, an interest in other people's point of view. He should ask questions, reply to arguments, encourage, elicit expressions of opinion. He should not desire to steer his own course, but follow the line that the talk happens to take. If he aims at the reputation of being a good talker, he will win a far higher fame by pursuing this course ; for it is a lamentable fact that, after a lively talk, one is apt to remember far better what one has oneself contributed to the discussion than what other people have said ; and if you can send guests away from a gathering feeling that they have talked well, they will be disposed in that genial mood to concede conversational merit to the other participators. A naïve and simple-minded friend of my own once cast

an extraordinary light on the subject, by saying to me, the day after an agreeable symposium at my own house, "We had a very pleasant evening with you yesterday. I was in great form"!

The only two kinds of talker that I find tiresome are the talker of paradoxes and the egotist. A few paradoxes are all very well; they are stimulating and gently provocative. But one gets tired of a string of them; they become little more than a sort of fence erected round a man's mind; one despairs of ever knowing what a paradoxical talker really thinks. Half the charm of good talk consists in the glimpses and peeps one gets into the stuff of a man's thoughts; and it is wearisome to feel that a talker is for ever tossing subjects on his horns, perpetually trying to say the unexpected, the startling thing. In the best talk of all, a glade suddenly opens up, like the glades in the Alpine forests through which they bring the timber down to the valley; one sees a long green vista, all bathed in shimmering sunshine, with the dark head of a mountain at the top. So in the best talk one has a sudden sight of something high, sweet, serious, austere.

The other kind of talk that I find very disagreeable is the talk of a full-fledged egotist, who converses without reference to his hearers, and brings out what is in his mind. One gets interest-

ing things in this way from time to time; but the essence, as I have said, of good talk is that one should have provoking and stimulating peeps into other minds, not that one should be compelled to gaze and stare into them. I have a friend, or rather an acquaintance, whose talk is just as if he opened a trap-door into his mind: you look into a dark place where something flows, stream or sewer; sometimes it runs clear and brisk, but at other times it seems to be charged with dirt and débris; and yet there is no escape; you have to stand and look, to breathe the very odours of the mind, until he chooses to close the door.

The mistake that many earnest and persevering talkers make is to suppose that to be engrossed is the same thing as being engrossing. It is true of conversation as of many other things, that the half is better than the whole. People who are fond of talking ought to beware of being lengthy. How one knows the despair of conversing with a man who is determined to make a clear and complete statement of everything, and not to let his hearer off anything! Arguments, questions, views, rise in the mind in the course of the harangue, and are swept away by the moving stream. Such talkers suffer from a complacent feeling that their information is correct and complete, and that their deductions are necessarily

sound. But it is quite possible to form and hold a strong opinion, and yet to realise that it is after all only one point of view, and that there is probably much to be said on the other side. The unhappiest feature of drifting into a habit of positive and continuous talk is that one has few friends faithful enough to criticise such a habit and tell one the unvarnished truth; if the habit is once confirmed, it becomes almost impossible to break it off. I know of a family conclave that was once summoned, in order, if possible, to communicate the fact to one of the circle that he was in danger of becoming a bore; the head of the family was finally deputed to convey the fact as delicately as possible to the erring brother. He did so, with much tender circumlocution. The offender was deeply mortified, but endeavoured to thank his elderly relative for discharging so painful a task. He promised amendment. He sate glum and tongue-tied for several weeks in the midst of cheerful gatherings. Very gradually the old habit prevailed. Within six months he was as tedious as ever; but what is the saddest part of the whole business is that he has never quite forgiven the teller of the unwelcome news, while at the same time he labours under the impression that he has cured himself of the habit.

It is, of course, useless to attempt to make oneself into a brilliant talker, because the qualities needed—humour, quickness, the power of seeing unexpected connections, picturesque phrasing, natural charm, sympathy, readiness, and so forth —are things hardly attainable by effort. But much can be done by perseverance; and it is possible to form a deliberate habit of conversation by determining that however much one may be indisposed to talk, however unpromising one's companions may seem, one will at all events keep up an end. I have known really shy and unready persons who from a sheer sense of duty have made themselves into very tolerable talkers. A friend of my acquaintance confesses that a device she has occasionally employed is to think of subjects in alphabetical order. I could not practise this device myself, because when I had lighted upon, we will say, algebra, archery, and astigmatism, as possible subjects for talk, I should find it impossible to invent any gambit by which they could be successfully introduced.

The only recipe which I would offer to a student of the art is not to be afraid of apparent egotism, but to talk frankly of any subject in which he may be interested, from a personal point of view. An impersonal talker is apt to be a dull dog. There is nothing like a frank ex-

pression of personal views to elicit an equally frank expression of divergence or agreement. Neither is it well to despise the day of small things; the weather, railway travelling, symptoms of illness, visits to a dentist, sea-sickness, as representing the universal experiences and interests of humanity, will often serve as *points d'appui*.

Of course there come to all people horrible tongue-tied moments when they can think of nothing to say, and feel like a walrus on an ice-floe, heavy, melancholy, ineffective. Such a catastrophe is almost invariably precipitated in my own case by being told that some one is particularly anxious to be introduced to me. A philosopher of my acquaintance, who was an admirable talker, told me that on a certain occasion, an evening party, his hostess led up a young girl to him, like Iphigenia decked for the sacrifice, and said that Miss —— was desirous of meeting him. The world became instantly a blank to him. The enthusiastic damsel stared at him with large admiring eyes. After a period of agonised silence, a remark occurred to him which he felt might have been appropriate if it had been made earlier in the encounter. He rejected it as useless, and after another interval a thought came to him which he saw might have served, if the suspense had not been already so prolonged; this was also

put aside; and after a series of belated remarks had occurred to him, each of which seemed to be hopelessly unworthy of the expectation he had excited, the hostess, seeing that things had gone wrong, came, like Artemis, and led Iphigenia away, without the philosopher having had the opportunity of indulging in a single reflection. The experience, he said, was of so appalling a character, that he set to, and invented a remark which he said was applicable to persons of all ages and of either sex, under any circumstances whatever; but, as he would never reveal this precious possession to the most ardent inquirers, the secret, whatever it was, has perished with him.

One of my friends has a perfectly unique gift of conversation. He is a prominent man of affairs, a perfect mine of political secrets. He is a ready talker, and has the art, both in a *tête-à-tête* as well as in a mixed company, of mentioning things which are extremely interesting, and appear to be hopelessly indiscreet. He generally accompanies his relation of these incidents with a request that the subject may not be mentioned outside. The result is that every one who is brought into contact with him feels that he is selected by the great man because of some happy gift of temperament, trustworthiness, or discretion

or even on grounds of personal importance, to be the recipient of this signal mark of confidence. On one occasion I endeavoured, after one of these conversations, not for the sake of betraying him, but in the interests of a diary which I keep, to formulate in precise and permanent terms some of this interesting intelligence. To my intense surprise and disappointment, I found myself entirely unable to recollect, much less to express, any of his statements. They had melted in the mind, like some delicate confection, and left behind them nothing but a faint aroma of interest and pleasure.

This would be a dangerous example to imitate, because it requires a very subtle species of art to select incidents and episodes which should both gratify the hearers, and which at the same time it should be impossible to hand on. Most people who attempted such a task would sink into being miserable blabbers of *tacenda*, mere sieves through which matters of secret importance would granulate into the hands of ardent journalists. But at once to stimulate and gratify curiosity, and to give a quiet circle the sense of being admitted to the inmost *penetralia* of affairs, is a triumph of conversational art.

Dr. Johnson used to say that he loved to stretch his legs and have his talk out; and the fact re-

mains that the best conversation one gets is the conversation that one does not scheme for, and even on occasions from which one has expected but little. The talks that remain in my mind as of pre-eminent interest are long leisurely *tête-à-tête* talks, oftenest perhaps of all in the course of a walk, when exercise sends the blood coursing through the brain, when a pleasant countryside tunes the spirit to a serene harmony of mood, and when the mind, stimulated into a joyful readiness by association with some quiet, just, and perceptive companion, visits its dusty warehouse, and turns over its fantastic stores. Then is the time to penetrate into the inmost labyrinths of a subject, to indulge in pleasing discursiveness, as the fancy leads one, and yet to return again and again with renewed relish to the central theme. Such talks as these, with no overshadowing anxiety upon the mind, held on breezy uplands or in pleasant country lanes, make the moments, indeed, to which the mind, in the sad mood which remembers the days that are gone, turns with that sorrowful desolation of which Dante speaks, as to a treasure lightly spent and ungratefully regarded. How such hours rise up before the mind! Even now as I write I think of such a scene, when I walked with a friend, long dead, on the broad yellow sands

beside a western sea. I can recall the sharp hiss of the shoreward wind, the wholesome savours of the brine, the soft clap of small waves, the sand-dunes behind the shore, pricked with green tufts of grass, the ships moving slowly on the sea's rim, and the shadowy headland to which we hardly seemed to draw more near, while we spoke of all that was in our hearts, and all that we meant to do and be. That day was a great gift from God; and yet, as I received it, I did not know how fair a jewel of memory it would be. I like to think that there are many such jewels of recollection clasped close in the heart's casket, even in the minds of men and women that I meet, that seem so commonplace to me, so interesting to themselves!

It is strange, in reflecting about the memorable talks I have held with different people, to find that I remember best the talks that I have had with men, rather than with women. There is a kind of simple openness, an equal comradeship in talks with men, which I find it difficult to attain in the case of women. I suppose that some unsuspected mystery of sex creeps in, and that with women there is a whole range of experiences and emotions that one does not share, so that there is an invisible and intangible barrier erected between the two minds. I feel, too, in

talking with women, that I am met with almost too much sympathy and tact, so that one falls into an egotistical mood. It is difficult, too, I find, to be as frank in talking with women as with men; because I think that women tend more than men to hold a preconceived idea of one's character and tastes; and it is difficult to talk simply and naturally to any one who has formed a mental picture of one, especially if one is aware that it is not correct. But men are slower to form impressions, and thus talk is more experimental; moreover, in talking with men, one encounters more opposition, and opposition puts one more on one's mettle.

Thus a *tête-à-tête* with a man of similar tastes, who is just and yet sympathetic, critical yet appreciative, whose point of view just differs enough to make it possible for him to throw sidelights on a subject, and to illumine aspects of it that were unperceived and neglected—this is a high intellectual pleasure, a potion to be delicately sipped at leisure.

But after all it is impossible to say what makes a conversationalist. There are people who seem to possess every qualification for conversing except the power to converse. The two absolutely essential things are, in the first place, a certain charm of mind and even manner,

which is a purely instinctive gift; and, in the second place, real sympathy with, real interest in, the deuteragonist.

People can be useful talkers, even interesting talkers, without these gifts. One may like to hear what a man of vigorous mind may have to say on a subject that he knows well, even if he is unsympathetic. But then one listens in a receptive frame of mind, as though one were prepared to attend a lecture. There are plenty of useful talkers at a University, men whom it is a pleasure to meet occasionally, men with whom one tries, so to speak, a variety of conversational flies, and who will give one fine sport when they are fairly hooked. But though a University is a place where one ought to expect to find abundance of the best talk, the want of leisure among the present generation of Dons is a serious bar to interesting talk. By the evening the majority of Dons are apt to be tired. They have been hard at work most of the day, and they look upon the sociable evening hours as a time to be given up to what the Scotch call "daffing"; that is to say, a sort of nimble interchange of humorous or interesting gossip; a man who pursues a subject intently is apt to be thought a bore. I think that the middle-aged Don is apt to be less interesting

than either the elderly or the youthful Don. The middle-aged Don is, like all successful professional men, full to the brim of affairs. He has little time for general reading. He lectures, he attends meetings, his table is covered with papers, and his leisure hours are full of interviews. But the younger Don is generally less occupied and more enthusiastic; and best of all is the elderly Don, who is beginning to take things more easily, has a knowledge of men, a philosophy and a good-humoured tolerance which makes him more accessible. He is not in a hurry, he is not preoccupied. He studies the daily papers with deliberation, and he has just enough duties to make him feel wholesomely busy. His ambitions are things of the past, and he is gratified by attention and deference.

I suppose the same is the case, in a certain degree, all the world over. But the truth about conversation is that, to make anything of it, people must realise it as a definite mental occupation, and not merely a dribbling into words of casual thoughts. To do it well implies a certain deliberate intention, a certain unselfishness, a certain zest. The difficulty is that it demands a catholicity of interests, a full mind. Yet it does not do to have a subject on the brain, and to introduce it into all companies. The pity is that

conversation is not more recognised as a definite accomplishment. People who care about the success of social gatherings are apt to invite an instrumentalist or a singer, or a man with what may be called parlour tricks; but few people are equally careful to plant out two or three conversationalists among their parties, or to take care that their conversationalists are provided with a sympathetic background.

For the fact remains that conversation is a real art, and depends like all other arts upon congenial circumstances and suitable surroundings. People are too apt to believe that, because they have interests in their minds and can put those interests into words, they are equipped for the pretty and delicate game of talk. But a rare admixture of qualities is needed, and a subtle conversational effect, a sudden fancy, that throws a charming or a bizarre light on a subject, a power of pleasing metaphorical expression, the communication of an imaginative interest to a familiar topic—all these things are of the nature of instinctive art. I have heard well-informed and sensible people talk of a subject in a way that made me feel that I desired never to hear it mentioned again; but I have heard, on the other hand, people talk of matters which I had believed to be worn threadbare by use,

and yet communicate a rich colour, a fragrant sentiment to them, which made me feel that I had never thought adequately on the topic before. One should be careful, I think, to express to such persons one's appreciation and admiration of their gifts, for the art is so rare that we ought to welcome it when we find it; and, like all arts, it depends to a great extent for its sustenance on the avowed gratitude of those who enjoy it. It is on these subtle half-toned glimpses of personality and difference that most of our happy impressions of life depend; and no one can afford wilfully to neglect sources of innocent joy, or to lose opportunities of pleasure through a stupid or brutal contempt for the slender resources out of which these gentle effects are produced.

VI

BEAUTY

I WAS visited, as I sate in my room to-day, by one of those sudden impressions of rare beauty that come and go like flashes, and which leave one desiring a similar experience. The materials of the impression were simple and familiar enough. My room looks out into a little court; there is a plot of grass, and to the right of it an old stone-built wall, close against which stands a row of aged lime-trees. Straight opposite, at right angles to the wall, is the east side of the Hall, with its big plain traceried window enlivened with a few heraldic shields of stained glass. While I was looking out to-day there came a flying burst of sun, and the little corner became a sudden feast of delicate colour; the fresh green of the grass, the foliage of the lime-trees, their brown wrinkled stems, the pale moss on the walls, the bright points of colour in the emblazonries of the window, made a sudden delicate harmony of tints. I had

seen the place a hundred times before without ever guessing what a perfect picture it made.

What a strange power the perception of beauty is! It seems to ebb and flow like some secret tide, independent alike of health or disease, of joy or sorrow. There are times in our lives when we seem to go singing on our way, and when the beauty of the world sets itself like a quiet harmony to the song we uplift. Then again come seasons when all is well with us, when we are prosperous and contented, interested in life and all its concerns, when no perception of beauty comes near us; when we are tranquil and content, and take no heed of the delicate visions of the day; when music has no inner voice, and poetry seems a mere cheerful jingling of ordered phrases. Then again we have a time of gloom and dreariness; work has no interest, pleasure no savour; we go about our business and our delight alike in a leaden mood of dulness; and yet again, when we are surrounded with care and trouble, perhaps in pain or weakness of body, there flashes into the darkened life an exquisite perception of things beautiful and rare; the vision of a spring copse with all its tapestry of flowers, bright points of radiant colours, fills us with a strange yearning, a delightful pain; in such a mood a few chords of music, the haunting melody of some familiar line

of verse, the song of a bird at dawn, the light of sunset on lonely fields, thrill us with an inexpressible rapture. Perhaps some of those who read these words will say that it is all an unreal, a fantastic experience of which I speak. Of course there are many tranquil, wholesome, equable natures to whom such an experience is unknown; but it is to me one of the truest and commonest things of my life to be visited by this strange perception and appreciation of beauty, which gives the days in which I am conscious of it a memorable quality, that seems to make them the momentous days of one's life; and yet again the mood is so utterly withdrawn at intervals, that the despondent spirit feels that it can never return; and then a new day dawns, and the sense comes back again to bless me.

If the emotion which I describe followed the variations of bodily health; if it came when all was prosperous and joyful, and was withdrawn when the light was low; if it deserted me in seasons of robust vigour, and came when the bodily vitality was depressed, I could refer it to some physical basis. But it contradicts all material laws, and seems to come and go with a whimsical determination of its own. When it is with me, nothing can banish it; it pulls insistently at my elbow; it diverts my attention in

the midst of the gravest business; and, on the other hand, no extremity of sorrow or gloom can suspend it. I have stood beside the grave of one I loved, with the shadow of urgent business, of hard detailed arrangements of a practical kind, hanging over me, with the light gone out of life, and the prospect unutterably dreary; and yet the strange spirit has been with me, so that a strain of music should have power to affect me to tears, and the delicate petals of the very funeral wreaths should draw me into a rapturous contemplation of their fresh curves, their lovely intricacy, their penetrating fragrance. In such a moment one could find it in one's heart to believe that some ethereal soulless creature, like Ariel of the "Tempest," was floating at one's side, directing one's attention, like a petulant child, to the things that touched its light-hearted fancy, and constraining one into an unsought enjoyment.

Neither does it seem to be an intellectual process; because it comes in the same self-willed way, alike when one's mind is deeply engrossed in congenial work, as well as when one is busy and distracted; one raises one's head for an instant, and the sunlight on a flowing water or on an ancient wall, the sound of the wind among trees, the calling of birds, take one captive with the mysterious spell; or on another day when I am working,

under apparently the same conditions, the sun may fall golden on the old garden, the dove may murmur in the high elm, the daffodils may hang their sweet heads among the meadow-grass, and yet the scene may be dark to me and silent, with no charm and no significance.

It all seems to enact itself in a separate region of the spirit, neither in the physical nor in the mental region. It may come for a few moments in a day, and then it may depart in an instant. I was taking a week ago what, for the sake of the associations, I call my holiday. I walked with a cheerful companion among spring woods, lying nestled in the folds and dingles of the Sussex hills; the sky was full of flying gleams; the distant ridges, clothed in wood, lay blue and remote in the warm air; but I cared for none of these things. Then, when we stood for a moment in a place where I have stood a hundred times before, where a full stream spills itself over a pair of broken lock-gates into a deserted lock, where the stonecrop grows among the masonry, and the alders root themselves among the mouldering brickwork, the mood came upon me, and I felt like a thirsty soul that has found a bubbling spring coming out cool from its hidden caverns on the hot hillside. The sight, the sound, fed and satisfied

my spirit; and yet I had not known that I had needed anything.

That it is, I will not say, a wholly capricious thing, but a thing that depends upon a certain harmony of mood, is best proved by the fact that the same poem or piece of music which can at one time evoke the sensation most intensely, will at another time fail to convey the slightest hint of charm, so that one can even wonder in a dreary way what it could be that one had ever admired and loved. But it is this very evanescent quality which gives me a certain sense of security. If one reads the lives of people with strong æsthetic perceptions, such as Rossetti, Pater, J. A. Symonds, one feels that these natures ran a certain risk of being absorbed in delicate perception. One feels that a sensation of beauty was to them so rapturous a thing that they ran the risk of making the pursuit of such sensations the one object and business of their existence; of sweeping the waters of life with busy nets, in the hope of entangling some creature "of bright hue and sharp fin"; of considering the days and hours that were unvisited by such perceptions barren and dreary. This is, I cannot help feeling, a dangerous business; it is to make of the soul nothing but a delicate instrument for registering

æsthetic perceptions; and the result is a loss of balance and proportion, an excess of sentiment. The peril is that, as life goes on, and as the perceptive faculty gets blunted and jaded, a mood of pessimism creeps over the mind.

From this I am personally saved by the fact that the sense of beauty is, as I have said, so whimsical in its movements. I should never think of setting out deliberately to capture these sensations, because it would be so futile a task. No kind of occupation, however prosaic, however absorbing, seems to be either favourable to this perception, or the reverse. It is not even like bodily health, which has its variations, but is on the whole likely to result from a certain defined *rêgime* of diet, exercise, and habits; and what would still more preserve me from making a deliberate attempt to capture it would be that it comes perhaps most poignantly and insistently of all when I am uneasy, overstrained, and melancholy. No! the only thing to do is to live one's life without reference to it, to be thankful when it comes, and to be contented when it is withdrawn.

I sometimes think that a great deal of stuff is both written and talked about the beauties of nature. By this I do not mean for a

moment that nature is less beautiful than is supposed, but that many of the rapturous expressions one hears and sees used about the enjoyment of nature are very insincere; though it is equally true on the other hand that a great deal of genuine admiration of natural beauty is not expressed, perhaps hardly consciously felt. To have a true and deep appreciation of nature demands a certain poetical force, which is rare; and a great many people who have a considerable power of expression, but little originality, feel bound to expend a portion of this upon expressing an admiration for nature which they do not so much actually feel as think themselves bound to feel, because they believe that people in general expect it of them.

But on the other hand there is, I am sure, in the hearts of many quiet people a real love for and delight in the beauty of the kindly earth, the silent and exquisite changes, the influx and efflux of life, which we call the seasons, the rich transfiguring influences of sunrise and sunset, the slow or swift lapse of clear streams, the march and plunge of sea-billows the bewildering beauty and aromatic scents of those delicate toys of God which we call flowers, the large air and the sun, the star-strewn spaces of the night.

Those who are fortunate enough to spend their lives in the quiet country-side have much of this tranquil and unuttered love of nature; and others again, who are condemned by circumstances to spend their days in toilsome towns, and yet have the instinct, derived perhaps from long generations of country forefathers, feel this beauty, in the short weeks when they are enabled to approach it, more poignantly still.

FitzGerald tells a story of how he went to see Thomas Carlyle in London, and sate with him in a room at the top of his house, with a wide prospect of house-backs and chimney-pots; and how the sage reviled and vituperated the horrors of city life, and yet left on FitzGerald's mind the impression that perhaps after all he did not really wish to leave it.

The fact remains, however, that a love of nature is part of the panoply of cultivation which at the present time people above a certain social standing feel bound to assume. Very few ordinary persons would care to avow that they took no interest in national politics, in games and sport, in literature, in appreciation of nature, or in religion. As a matter of fact the vital interest that is taken in these subjects,

except perhaps in games and sport, is far below the interest that is expressed in them. A person who said frankly that he thought that any of these subjects were uninteresting, tiresome or absurd, would be thought stupid or affected, even brutal. Probably most of the people who express a deep concern for these things believe that they are giving utterance to a sincere feeling; but not to expatiate on the emotions which they mistake for the real emotion in the other departments, there are probably a good many people who mistake for a love of nature the pleasure of fresh air, physical movements, and change of scene. Many worthy golfers, for instance, who do not know that they are speaking insincerely, attribute, in conversation, the pleasure they feel in pursuing their game to the agreeable surroundings in which it is pursued; but my secret belief is that they pay more attention to the lie of the little white ball, and the character of bunkers, than to the pageantry of sea and sky.

As with all other refined pleasures, there is no doubt that the pleasure derived from the observation of nature can be, if not acquired, immensely increased by practice. I am not now speaking of the pursuit of natural history

but the pursuit of natural emotion. The thing to aim at, as is the case with all artistic pleasures, is the perception of quality, of small effects. Many of the people who believe themselves to have an appreciation of natural scenery cannot appreciate it except on a sensational scale. They can derive a certain pleasure from wide prospects of startling beauty, rugged mountains, steep gorges, great falls of water—all the things that are supposed to be picturesque. But though this is all very well as far as it goes, it is a very elementary kind of thing. The perception of which I speak is a perception which can be fed in the most familiar scene, in the shortest stroll, even in a momentary glance from a window. The things to look out for are little accidents of light and colour, little effects of chance grouping, the transfiguration of some well-known and even commonplace object, such as is produced by the sudden burst into greenness of the trees that peep over some suburban garden wall, or by the sunlight falling, by a happy fortune, on pool or flower. Much of course depends upon the inner mood; there are days when it seems impossible to be thrilled by anything, when a perverse dreariness holds the mind; and then all of a sudden the gentle

and wistful mood flows back, and the world is full of beauty to the brim.

Here, if anywhere, in this town of ancient colleges, is abundant material of beauty for eye and mind. It is not, it is true, the simple beauty of nature; but nature has been invoked to sanctify and mellow art. These stately stone-fronted buildings have weathered like crags and precipices. They rise out of dark ancient embowered gardens. They are like bright birds of the forest dwelling contentedly in gilded cages. These great palaces of learning, beautiful when seen in the setting of sunny gardens, and with even a sterner dignity when planted, like a fortress of quiet, close to the very dust and din of the street, hold many treasures of stately loveliness and fair association; this city of palaces, thick-set with spires and towers, as rich and dim as Camelot, is invested with a romance that few cities can equal; and then the waterside pleasaunces with their trim alleys, their air of ancient security and wealthy seclusion, have an incomparable charm; day by day, as one hurries or saunters through the streets, the charm strikes across the mind with an incredible force, a newness of impression which is the test of the highest beauty. Yet these again are beauties of a

sensational order which beat insistently upon the dullest mind. The true connoisseur of natural beauty acquiesces in, nay prefers, an economy, an austerity of effect. The curve of a wood seen a hundred times before, the gentle line of a fallow, a little pool among the pastures, fringed with rushes, the long blue line of the distant downs, the cloud-perspective, the still sunset glow—these will give him ever new delights, and delights that grow with observation and intuition.

I have spoken hitherto of nature as she appears to the unruffled, the perceptive mind; but let us further consider what relation nature can bear to the burdened heart and the overshadowed mood. Is there indeed a *vis medicatrix* in nature which can heal our grief and console our anxieties? "The country for a wounded heart" says the old proverb. Is that indeed true? I am here inclined to part company with wise men and poets who have spoken and sung of the consoling power of nature. I think it is not so. It is true that anything which we love very deeply has a certain power of distracting the mind. But I think there is no greater agony than to be confronted with tranquil passionate beauty, when the heart and spirit are out of tune with it. In the days of one's joy, nature laughs with us; in the days of vague

and fantastic melancholy, there is an air of wistfulness, of mystery, that ministers to our luxurious sadness. But when one bears about the heavy burden of a harassing anxiety of sorrow, then the smile on the face of nature has something poisonous, almost maddening about it. It breeds an emotion that is like the rage of Othello when he looks upon the face of Desdemona, and believes her false. Nature has no sympathy, no pity. She has her work to do, and the swift and bright process goes on; she casts her failures aside with merciless glee; she seems to say to men oppressed by sorrow and sickness, "This is no world for you; rejoice and make merry, or I have no need of you." In a far-off way, indeed, the gentle beauty of nature may help a sad heart, by seeming to assure one that the mind of God is set upon what is fair and sweet; but neither God nor nature seems to have any direct message to the stricken heart.

> "Not till the fire is dying in the grate
> Look we for any kinship with the stars,"

says a subtle poet; and such comfort as nature can give is not the direct comfort of sympathy and tenderness, but only the comfort that can be resolutely distilled from the contemplation of nature by man's indomitable spirit. For nature

tends to replace rather than to heal; and the sadness of life consists for most of us in the irreplaceableness of the things we love and lose. The lesson is a hard one, that "Nature tolerates, she does not need." Let us only be sure that it is a true one, for nothing but the truth can give us ultimate repose. To the youthful spirit it is different, for all that the young and ardent need is that, if the old fails them, some new delight should be substituted. They but desire that the truth should be hidden from their gaze; as in the childish stories, when the hero and heroine have been safely piloted through danger and brought into prosperity, the door is closed with a snap. "They lived happily ever afterwards." But the older spirit knows that the "ever" must be deleted, makes question of the "afterwards," and looks through to the old age of bereavement and sorrow, when the two must again be parted.

But I would have every one who cares to establish a wise economy of life and joy, cultivate, by all means in his power, a sympathy with and a delight in nature. We tend, in this age of ours, when communication is so easy and rapid, when the daily paper brings the whole course of the world into our secluded libraries, to be too busy, too much preoccupied; to value

excitement above tranquillity, and interest above peace. It is good for us all to be much alone, not to fly from society, but resolutely to determine that we will not be dependent upon it for our comfort. I would have all busy people make times in their lives when, at the cost of some amusement, and paying the price perhaps of a little melancholy, they should try to be alone with nature and their own hearts. They should try to realise the quiet unwearying life that manifests itself in field and wood. They should wander alone in solitary places, where the hazel-hidden stream makes music, and the bird sings out of the heart of the forest; in meadows where the flowers grow brightly, or through the copse, purple with bluebells or starred with anemones; or they may climb the crisp turf of the down, and see the wonderful world lie spread out beneath their feet, with some clustering town "smouldering and glittering" in the distance; or lie upon the cliff-top, with the fields of waving wheat behind, and the sea spread out like a wrinkled marble floor in front; or walk on the sand beside the falling waves. Perhaps a *soi-disant* sensible man may see these words and think that I am a sad sentimentalist. I cannot help it; it is what I believe; nay, I will go further, and say that a man who does not wish

to do these things is shutting one of the doors of his spirit, a door through which many sweet and true things come in. "Consider the lilies of the field" said long ago One whom we profess to follow as our guide and Master. And a quiet receptiveness, an openness of eye, a simple readiness to take in these gentle impressions is, I believe with all my heart, of the essence of true wisdom. We have all of us our work to do in the world; but we have our lesson to learn as well. The man with the muck-rake in the old parable, who raked together the straws and the dust of the street, was faithful enough if he was set to do that lowly work; but had he only cared to look up, had he only had a moment's leisure, he would have seen that the celestial crown hung close above his head, and within reach of his forgetful hand.

There is a well-known passage in a brilliant modern satire, where a trenchant satirist declares that he has tracked all human emotions to their lair, and has discovered that they all consist of some dilution of primal and degrading instincts. But the pure and passionless love of natural beauty can have nothing that is acquisitive or reproductive about it. There is no physical instinct to which it can be referred; it arouses no sense of proprietorship; it cannot be con-

nected with any impulse for self-preservation. If it were merely aroused by tranquil, comfortable amenities of scene, it might be referable to the general sense of well-being, and of contented life under pleasant conditions. But it is aroused just as strongly by prospects that are inimical to life and comfort, lashing storms, inaccessible peaks, desolate moors, wild sunsets, foaming seas. It is a sense of wonder, of mystery; it arouses a strange and yearning desire for we know not what; very often a rich melancholy attends it, which is yet not painful or sorrowful, but heightens and intensifies the significance, the value of life. I do not know how to interpret it, but it seems to me to be a call from without, a beckoning of some large and loving power to the soul. The primal instincts of which I have spoken all tend to concentrate the mind upon itself, to strengthen it for a selfish part; but the beauty of nature seems to be a call to the spirit to come forth, like the voice which summoned Lazarus from the rock-hewn sepulchre. It bids us to believe that our small identities, our limited desires, do not say the last word for us, but that there is something larger and stronger outside, in which we may claim a share. As I write these words, I look out upon a strange transfiguration of a familiar scene. The sky is full

of black and inky clouds, but from the low setting sun there pours an intense pale radiance, which lights up house-roofs, trees, and fields, with a white light; a flight of pigeons, wheeling high in the air, become brilliant specks of moving light upon a background of dark rolling vapour. What is the meaning of the intense and rapturous thrill that this sends through me? It is no selfish delight, no personal profit that it gives me. It promises me nothing, it sends me nothing but a deep and mysterious satisfaction, which seems to make light of my sullen and petty moods.

I was reading the other day, in a strange book, of the influence of magic upon the spirit, the vague dreams of the deeper mind that could be awakened by the contemplation of symbols. It seemed to me to be unreal and fantastic, a manufacturing of secrets, a playing of whimsical tricks with the mind; and yet I ought not to say that, because it was evidently written in good faith. But I have since reflected that it is true in a sense of all those who are sensitive to the influences of the spirit. Nature has a magic for many of us—that is to say, a secret power that strikes across our lives at intervals, with a message from an unknown region. And this message is aroused too by symbols; a tree,

a flash of light on lonely clouds, a flower, a stream—simple things that we have seen a thousand times—have sometimes the power to cast a spell over our spirit, and to bring something that is great and incommunicable near us. This must be called magic, for it is not a thing which can be explained by ordinary laws, or defined in precise terms; but the spell is there, real, insistent, undeniable; it seems to make a bridge for the spirit to pass into a far-off, dimly apprehended region; it gives us a sense of great issues and remote visions; it leaves us with a longing which has no mortal fulfilment.

These are of course merely idiosyncrasies of perception; but it is a far more difficult task to attempt to indicate what the perception of beauty is, and whence the mind derives the unhesitating canons with which it judges and appraises beauty. The reason, I believe, why the sense is weaker than it need be in many people, is that, instead of trusting their own instinct in the matter, they from their earliest years endeavour to correct their perception of what is beautiful by the opinions of other people, and to superimpose on their own taste the taste of others. I myself hold strongly that nothing is worth admiring which is not admired sincerely. Of course one

must not form one's opinions too early, or hold them arrogantly or self-sufficiently. If one finds a large number of people admiring or professing to admire a certain class of objects, a certain species of scene, one ought to make a resolute effort to see what it is that appeals to them. But there ought to come a time, when one has imbibed sufficient experience, when one should begin to decide and to distinguish, and to form one's own taste. And then I believe it is better to be individual than catholic, and better to attempt to feed one's own genuine sense of preference, than to continue attempting to correct it by the standard of other people.

It remains that the whole instinct for admiring beauty is one of the most mysterious experiences of the mind. There are certain things, like the curves and colours of flowers, the movements of young animals, that seem to have a perennial attraction for the human spirit. But the enjoyment of natural scenery, at all events of wild and rugged prospects, seems hardly to have existed among ancient writers, and to have originated as late as the eighteenth century. Dr. Johnson spoke of mountains with disgust, and Gray seems to have been probably the first man who deliberately cultivated a delight in the sight of those "monstrous creatures of God," as he

calls mountains. Till his time, the emotions that "nodding rocks" and "cascades" gave our forefathers seem mostly to have been emotions of terror; but Gray seems to have had a perception of the true quality of landscape beauty, as indeed that wonderful, chilly, unsatisfied, critical nature seems to have had of almost everything. His letters are full of beautiful vignettes, and it pleases me to think that he visited Rydal and thought it beautiful, about the time that Wordsworth first drew breath.

But the perception of beauty in art, in architecture, in music, is a far more complicated thing, for there seem to be no fixed canons here; what one needs in art, for instance, is not that things should be perfectly seen and accurately presented; a picture of hard fidelity is often entirely displeasing; but one craves for a certain sense of personality, of emotion, of inner truth; something that seizes tyrannously upon the soul, and makes one desire more of the intangible and indescribable essence.

I always feel that the instinct for beauty is perhaps the surest indication of some essence of immortality in the soul; and indeed there are moments when it gives one the sense of preexistence, the feeling that one has loved these fair things in a region that is further back even

than the beginnings of consciousness. Blake, indeed, in one of his wild half-inspired utterances, went even further, and announced that a man's hopes of immortality depended not upon virtuous conduct but upon intellectual perception. And it is hard to resist the belief, when one is brought into the presence of perfect beauty, in whatever form it may come, that the deep craving it arouses is meant to receive a satisfaction more deep and real than the act of mere contemplation can give. I have felt in such moments as if I were on the verge of grasping some momentous secret, as if only the thinnest of veils hung between me and some knowledge that would set my whole life and being on a different plane. But the moment passes, and the secret delays. Yet we are right to regard such emotions as direct messages from God; because they bring with them no desire of possession, which is the sign of mortality, but rather the divine desire to be possessed by them; that the reality, whatever it be, of which beauty is the symbol, may enter in and enthral the soul. It remains a mystery, like all the best things to which we draw near. And the joy of all mysteries is the certainty which comes from their contemplation, that there are many doors yet for the soul to open on her upward and inward way: that we are at the

threshold and not near the goal; and then, like the glow of sunset, rises the hope that the grave, far from being the gate of death, may be indeed the gate of life.

VII

ART

I OFTEN wish that we had a more beautiful word than " art " for so beautiful a thing ; it is in itself a snappish explosive word, like the cry of an angry animal ; and it has, too, to bear the sad burden of its own misuse by affected people. Moreover, it stands for so many things, that one is never quite sure what the people who use it intend it to mean ; some people use it in an abstract, some in a concrete sense ; and it is unfortunate, too, in bearing, in certain usages, a *nuance* of unreality and scheming.

What I mean by art, in its deepest and truest sense, is a certain perceptiveness, a power of seeing what is characteristic, coupled as a rule, in the artistic temperament, with a certain power of expression, an imaginative gift which can raise a large fabric out of slender resources, building a palace, like the Genie in the story of Aladdin, in a single night.

The artistic temperament is commoner, I think, than is supposed. Most people find it difficult to

believe in the existence of it, unless it is accompanied by certain fragile signs of its existence, such as water-colour drawing, or a tendency to strum on a piano. But, as a matter of fact, the possession of an artistic temperament, without the power of expression, is one of the commonest causes of unhappiness in the world. Who does not know those ill-regulated, fastidious people, who have a strong sense of their own significance and position, a sense which is not justified by any particular performance, who are contemptuous of others, critical, hard to satisfy, who have a general sense of disappointment and dreariness, a craving for recognition, and a feeling that they are not appreciated at their true worth? To such people, sensitive, ineffective, proud, every circumstance of life gives food for discontent. They have vague perceptions which they cannot translate into words or symbols. They find their work humdrum and unexciting, their relations with others tiresome; they think that under different circumstances and in other surroundings they might have played a braver part; they never realise that the root of their unhappiness lies in themselves; and, perhaps, it is merciful that they do not, for the fact that they can accumulate blame upon the conditions imposed on them by fate is the only thing that saves them from irreclaimable depression.

Sometimes, again, the temperament exists with a certain power of expression, but without sufficient perseverance or hard technical merit to produce artistic successes; and thus we get the amateur. Sometimes it is the other way, and the technical power of production is developed beyond the inner perceptiveness; and this produces a species of dull soulless art, and the *rôle* of the professional artist. Very rarely one sees the outward and the inward power perfectly combined, but then we get the humble, hopeful artist who lives for and in his work; he is humble because he cannot reach the perfection for which he strives; he is hopeful because he gets nearer to it day by day. But, speaking generally, the temperament is not one that brings steady happiness; it brings with it moments of rapture, when some bright dream is being realised; but it brings with it also moments of deep depression, when dreams are silent, and the weary brain fears that the light is quenched. There are, indeed, instances of the equable disposition being found in connection with the artistic temper; such were Reynolds, Handel, Wordsworth. But the annals of art are crowded with the figures of those who have had to bear the doom of art, and have been denied the tranquil spirit.

But besides all these, there are artistic tempera-

ments which do not express themselves in any of the recognised mediums of art, but which apply their powers direct to life itself. I do not mean successful, professional people, who win their triumphs by a happy sanity and directness of view, to whom labour is congenial and success enjoyable; but I mean those who have a fine perception of quality in innumerable forms; who are interested in the salient points of others, who delight to enter into appropriate relations with those they meet, to whom life itself, its joys and sorrows, its gifts and its losses, has a certain romantic, beautiful, mysterious savour. Such people have a strong sense of the significance of their relations with others, they enjoy dealing with characters, with problems, with situations. Having both interest and sympathy, they get the best out of other people; they pierce through the conventional fence that so many of us erect as a protection against intrusion. Such people bring the same perception to bear on technical art. They enjoy books, art, music, without any envious desire to produce; they can enjoy the noble pleasure of admiring and praising. Again and again, in reading the lives of artists, one comes across traces of these wise and generous spirits, who have loved the society of artists, have understood them, and whose admiration has never been

clouded by the least shadow of that jealousy which is the curse of most artistic natures. People without artistic sensibilities find the society of artists trying; because they see only their irritability, their vanity, their egotism, and cannot sympathise with the visions by which they are haunted. But those who can understand without jealousy, pass by the exacting vagaries of the artist with a gentle and tender compassion, and evoke what is sincere and generous and lovable, without any conscious effort.

It is not, I think, often enough realised that the basis of the successful artistic temperament is a certain hardness combined with great superficial sensitiveness. Those who see the artistic nature swiftly and emotionally affected by a beautiful or a pathetic thing, who see that a thought, a line of poetry, a bar of music, a sketch, will evoke a thrill of feeling to which they cannot themselves aspire, are apt to think that such a spirit is necessarily far and tender, and that it possesses unfathomable reserves of noble feeling. This is often a great mistake; far below the rapid current of changing and glittering emotion there often lies, in the artistic nature, a reserve, not of tenderness or depth, but of cold and critical calm There are very few people who are highly developed in one faculty who do not pay for it

in some other part of their natures. Below the emotion itself there sits enthroned a hard intellectual force, a power of appraising quality, a Rhadamanthine judgment. It is this hardness which has so often made artists such excellent men of business, so alert to strike favourable bargains. In those artists whose medium is words, this hardness is not so often detected as it is in the case of other artists, for they have the power of rhetoric, the power of luxuriously heightening impressions, indeed of imaginatively simulating a force which is in reality of a superficial nature. One of the greatest powers of great artists is that of hinting at an emotion which they have very possibly never intimately gauged.

I have sometimes thought that this is in all probability the reason why women, with all their power of swift impression, of subtle intuition, have so seldom achieved the highest stations in art. It is, I think, because they seldom or never have that calm, strong egotism at the base of their natures, which men so constantly have, and which indeed seems almost a condition of attaining the highest success in art. The male artist can believe whole-heartedly and with entire absorption in the value of what he is doing, can realise it as the one end of his being, the object for which his life was given him. He can believe that all experience, all

relations with others, all emotions, are and must be subservient to this one aim; they can deepen for him the channels in which his art flows; they can reveal and illustrate to him the significance of the world of which he is the interpreter. Such an aspiration can be a very high and holy thing; it can lead a man to live purely and laboriously, to make sacrifices, to endure hardness. But the altar on which the sacrifice is made, stands, when all is said and done, before the idol of self. But with women it is different. The deepest quality in their hearts is, one may gratefully say, an intense devotion to others, an unselfishness which is unconscious of itself; and thus their aim is to help, to encourage, to sympathise; and their artistic gifts are subordinated to a deeper purpose, the desire of giving and serving. One with such a passion in the heart is incapable of believing art to be the deepest thing in the world; it is to such an one more like the lily which floats upwards, to bloom on the surface of some dim pool, a thing exquisitely fair and symbolical of mysteries; but all growing out of the depths of life, and not a thing which is deeper and truer than life.

It is useless to try to dive deeper than the secrets of personality and temperament. One must merely be grateful for the beauty which

springs from them. We must reflect that the hard, vigorous, hammered quality, which is characteristic of the best art, can only be produced, in a mood of blind and unquestioning faith, by a temperament which believes that such production is its highest end. But one who stands a little apart from the artistic world, and yet ardently loves it, can see that, beautiful as is the dream of the artist, true and pure as his aspiration is, there is yet a deeper mystery of life still, of which art is nothing but a symbol and an evidence. Perhaps that very belief may of itself weaken a man's possibilities in art. But, for myself, I know that I regard the absorption in art as a terrible and strong temptation for one whose chief pleasure lies in the delight of expression, and who seems, in the zest of shaping a melodious sentence to express as perfectly and lucidly as possible the shape of the thought within, to touch the highest joy of which the spirit is capable. A thought, a scene of beauty comes home with an irresistible sense of power and meaning to the mind or eye; for God to have devised the pale liquid green of the enamelled evening sky, to have set the dark forms of trees against it, and to have hung a star in the thickening gloom—to have done this, and to see that it is good, seems, in certain

moods, to be the dearest work of the Divine mind; and the desire to express it, to speak simply of the sight, and of the joy that it arouses, comes upon the mind with a sweet agony, an irresistible spell; life would seem to have been well spent if one had only caught a few such imperishable ecstasies, and written them down in a record that might convey the same joy to others. But behind this rises the deeper conviction that this is not the end; that there are deeper and sweeter secrets in the heavenly treasure-house; and then comes in the shadow of a fear that, in yielding thus delightedly to these imperative joys, one is blinding the inner eye to the perception of the remoter and more divine truth. And then at last comes the conviction, in which it is possible alike to rest and to labour, that it is right to devote one's time and energy to presenting these rich emotions as perfectly as they can be presented, so long as one keeps open the further avenues of the soul, and believes that art is but one of the antechambers through which one must take one's faithful way, before the doors of the Presence itself can be flung wide.

But whether one be of the happy number or not who have the haunting instinct for some special form of expression, one may learn at

all events to deal with life in an artistic spirit. I do not at all mean by that that one should learn to overvalue the artistic side of life, to hold personal emotion to be a finer thing than unselfish usefulness. I mean rather that one should aim at the perception of quality, the quality of actions, the quality of thoughts, the quality of character; that one should not be misled by public opinion, that one should not consider the value of a man's thoughts to be affected by his social position; but that one should look out for and appreciate sense, vigour, faithfulness, kindness, rectitude, and originality, in however humble a sphere these qualities may be displayed. That one should fight hard against conventionality, that one should welcome beauty, both the beauty of natural things, as well as the beauty displayed in sincere and simple lives in every rank of life. I have heard conventional professional people, who thought they were giving utterance to manly and independent sentiments, speak slightingly of dukes and duchesses, as if the possession of high rank necessarily forfeited all claims to simplicity and true-heartedness. Such an attitude is as inartistic and offensive as for a duchess to think that fine courtesy and consideration could not be found among washerwomen. The truth is that beauty of character

is just as common and just as uncommon among people of high rank as it is among bagmen; and the only just attitude to adopt is to approach all persons simply and directly on the grounds of our common humanity. One who does this will find simplicity, tenderness, and rectitude among persons of high rank; he will also find conventionality, meanness, and complacency among them; when he is brought into contact with bagmen, he will find bagmen of sincerity, directness, and delicacy, while he will also find pompous, complacent, and conventional bagmen.

Of course the special circumstances of any life tend to develop certain innate faults of character into prominence; but it may safely be said that circumstances never develop a fault that is not naturally there; and, not to travel far for instances, I will only say that one of the most unaffected and humble-minded persons I have ever met was a duke, while one of the proudest and most affected Pharisees I ever encountered was a servant. It all depends upon a consciousness of values, a sense of proportion; the only way in which wealth and poverty, rank and insignificance, can affect a life, is in a certain degree of personal comfort; and it is one of the most elementary lessons that one can learn,

that it is not either wealth or poverty that can confer even comfort, but the sound constitution and the contented mind.

What I would here plead is that the artistic sense, of which I have spoken, should be deliberately and consciously cultivated. It is not an easy thing to get rid of conventionality, if one has been brought up on conventional lines; but I know by personal experience that the mere desire for simplicity and sincerity can effect something.

All persons engaged in education, whether formally or informally, whether as professed teachers or parents, ought to regard it as a sacred duty to cultivate this sense among the objects of their care. They ought to demand that all people, whether high or low, should be met with the same simple courtesy and consideration; they ought to train children both to speak their mind, and also to pay respect to the opinion of others; they ought not to insist upon obedience, without giving the reasons why it is desirable and necessary; they ought resolutely to avoid malicious gossip, but not the interested discussion of other personalities; they ought to follow, and to give, direct and simple motives for action, and to learn, if they do not know it, that it is from this simple and quiet independence of mind that

the best blessings, the best happinesses come; above all, they ought to practise a real and perceptive sympathy, to allow for differences of character and taste, not to try so much to form children on the model of their own characters, as to encourage them to develop on their own lines. To do this completely needs wisdom, tact, and justice; but nothing can excuse us from attempting it.

The reason why life is so often made into a dull and dreary business for ourselves and others, is that we accept some conventional standard of duty and rectitude, and heavily enforce it; we neglect the interest, the zest, the beauty of life. In my own career as an educator, I can truthfully say that when I arrived at some of the perceptions enunciated above, it made an immense difference to me. I saw that it was a mistake to coerce, to correct, to enforce; of course such things have to be done occasionally with wilful and perverse natures; but I realised, after I had gained some practice in dealing with boys, that generous and simple praise, outspoken encouragement, admiration, directness, could win victories that no amount of strictness or repression could win. I began to see that enthusiasm and interest were the contagious things, and that it was possible to sympathise genuinely

with tastes which one did not share. Of course there were plenty of failures on my own part, failures of irritability, stupidity, and indolence; but I soon realised that these were failures; and, after all, in education it matters more which way one's face is set than how fast one proceeds!

I seem, perhaps, to have strayed into the educational point of view; but it is only an instance of how the artistic method may be applied in a region which is believed by many to be remote from the region of art. The principle, after all, is a very clear one; it is that life can be made with a little effort into a beautiful thing; that the real ugliness of life consists not in its conditions, not in good or bad fortune, not in joy or sorrow, not in health or illness, but upon the perceptive attitude of mind which we can apply to all experiences. Everything that comes from the hand of God has the quality of which I am speaking; our business is to try to disentangle it from the prejudices, the false judgments, the severities, the heavinesses, with which human nature tends to overlay it. Imagine a man oppressed by all the ills which humanity can suffer, by shame and disease and failure. Can it be denied, in the presence of the life of Christ, that it is yet

possible to make out of such a situation a noble and a beautiful thing? And that is the supreme value of the example of Christ to the world, that He displayed, if I may so speak, the instinct which I have described in its absolute perfection. He met all humanity face to face, with perfect directness, perfect sympathy, perfect perception. He never ceased to protest, with shame and indignation, against the unhappinesses which men bring upon themselves, by the yielding to lower desires, by prejudice, by complacency; but He made allowance for weakness, and despaired of none; and in the presence of those darker and sadder afflictions of body and spirit, which it seems that God permits, if He does not authorise, He bore Himself with dignity, patience, and confidence; He proved that nothing was unbearable, but that the human spirit can face the worst calamities with an indomitable simplicity, which adorns it with an imperishable beauty, and proves it to be indeed divine.

VIII

EGOTISM

I HAD an experience the other day, very disagreeable but most wholesome, which held up for a moment a mirror to my life and character. I suppose that, at least once in his life, every one has known what it is, in some corridor or stairway, to see a figure advancing towards him, and then to discover with a shock of surprise that he has been advancing to a mirror, and that the stranger is himself. This happened to me some short while ago, and I was by no means favourably impressed by what I saw!

Well, the other day I was conducting an argument with an irascible man. His temper suddenly boiled over, and he said several personal things to me, of which I did not at once recognise the truth; but I have since considered the criticisms, and have decided that they are mainly true, heightened perhaps by a little tinge of temper.

I am sorry my friend said the things, because it is difficult to meet, on cordial terms, a man whom

one knows to hold an unfavourable opinion of oneself. But in one way I am glad he said them, because I do not think I could in any other manner have discerned the truth. If a friend had said them without anger, he would no doubt have so gilded the pill that it would have seemed rather a precious ornament than a bitter remedy.

I will not here say in detail what my friend accused me of, but it amounted to a charge of egotism; and as egotism is a common fault, and particularly common with lonely and unmarried men, I will make no excuse for propounding a few considerations on the point, and how it may perhaps be cured, or, if not cured, at least modified.

I suppose that the egotist is the man who regards the world as a setting for himself, as opposed to the man who realises that he is a small unit in a gigantic system. The characteristic of the egotist is to consider himself of too great importance, while the danger of the non-egotist is not sufficiently to realise his significance. Egotism is the natural temptation of all those whose individuality is strong; the man of intense desires, of acute perceptions, of vigorous preferences, of eager temperament, is in danger of trying to construct his life too sedulously on his own lines; and yet these are the very people who help other people most, and in whom the hope of the race

lies. Meek, humble, timid persons, who accept things as they are, who tread in beaten paths, who are easily persuaded, who are cautious, prudent, and submissive, leave things very much as they find them. I need make no attempt at indicating the line that such people ought to follow, because it is, unhappily, certain that they will follow the line of least resistance, and that they have no more power of initiative than the bricks of a wall or the waters of a stream. The following considerations will be addressed to people of a certain vividness of nature, who have strong impulses, fervent convictions, vigorous desires. I shall try to suggest a species of discipline that can be practised by such persons, a line that they can follow, in order that they may aim at, and perhaps attain, a due subordination and co-ordination of themselves and their temperaments.

To treat of intellectual egotism first, the danger that besets such people as I have described is a want of sympathy with other points of view, and the first thing that such natures must aim at, is the getting rid of what I will call the sectarian spirit. We ought to realise that absolute truth is not the property of any creed or school or nation; the whole lesson of history is the lesson of the danger of affirmation. The great difference between the modern and the ancient world is the

growth of the scientific spirit, and the meaning and value of evidence. There are many kinds of certainties. There is the absolute scientific certainty of such propositions as that two and two make four, and cannot possibly make five. This is of course only the principle that two and two cannot be said to *make* four, but that they *are* four, and that $2+2$ and 4 are only different ways of describing the same phenomenon. Then there come the lesser certainties, that is to say, the certainties that justify practical action. A man who is aware that he has twenty thousand pounds in the hands of trustees, whose duty it is to pay him the interest, is justified in spending a certain income; but he cannot be said to know at any moment that the capital is there, because the trustees may have absconded with the money, and the man may not have been informed of the fact. The danger of the egotist is that he is apt to regard as scientific certainties what are only relative certainties; and the first step towards the tolerant attitude is to get rid of these prejudices as far as possible, and to perceive that the first duty of the philosopher is not to deal in assumptions, but to realise that other people's regions of what may be called practical certainties—that is to say, the assurances which justify practical action—may be both smaller or even larger than his own.

The first duty then of the man of vivid nature is to fight resolutely against the sin of impatience. He must realise that some people may regard as a certainty what is to him a questionable opinion, and that his business is not the destruction of the certainties of others, but the defining the limits of his own. The sympathy that can be practised intellectually is the resolute attempt to enter into the position of others. The temptation to argue with people of convinced views should be resolutely resisted; argument only strengthens and fortifies the convictions of opponents, and I can honestly say that I have never yet met a man of strong intellectual fibre who was ever converted by argument. Yet I am sure that it is a duty for all of us to aim at a just appreciation of various points of view, and that we ought to try to understand others rather than to persuade them.

So far I have been speaking of the intellectual region, and I would sum it up by saying that I think that the duty of every thoughtful person, who desires to avoid egotism in the intellectual region, is to cultivate what may be called the scientific, or even the sceptical spirit, to weigh evidence, and not to form conclusions without evidence. Thus one avoids the dangers of egotism best, because egotism is the frame of mind of the man who says *credo quia credo*. Whereas the aim

of the philosopher should be to take nothing for granted, and to be ready to give up personal preferences in the light of truth. In dealing with others in the intellectual region, the object should be not to convince, but to get people to state their own views, and to realise that unless a man converts himself, no one else can; the method therefore should be not to attack conclusions, but to ask patiently for the evidence upon which those conclusions are based.

But there is a danger in lingering too long in the intellectual regions; the other regions of the human spirit may be called the æsthetic and the mystical regions. To take the æsthetic region next, the duty of the philosopher is to realise at the outset that the perception of beauty is essentially an individual thing, and that the canons of what are called good taste are of all things the most shifting. In this region the danger of dogmatism is very great, because the more that a man indulges the rapturous perception of the beauty that appeals to himself, the more likely he is to believe that there is no beauty outside of his own perceptions. The duty of a man who wishes to avoid egotism in this region is to try and recognise faithful conception and firm execution everywhere; to realise that half, and more than half, of the beauty of everything is

the beauty of age, remoteness, and association. There is no temptation so strong for the æsthetic nature, as to deride and contemn the beauty of the art that we have just outgrown. To take a simple case. The Early Victorian upholsterers derided the stiffness and austerity of Queen Anne furniture, and the public genuinely admired the florid and rococo forms of Early Victorian art. A generation passed, and Early Victorian art was relentlessly derided, while the Queen Anne was reinstalled. Now there are signs of a growing tolerance among connoisseurs of the Early Victorian taste again. The truth is that there is no absolute beauty in either; that the thing to aim at is progress and development in art, and that probably the most dangerous and decadent sign of all is the reverting to the beauty of a previous age rather than striking out a new line of our own. The aim then of the man who would avoid æsthetic egotism should be, not to lay down canons of what is or what is not good art, but to try to recognise, as I have said, faithful conception and firm execution wherever he can discern it; and, for himself, to express as vividly as he can his own keenest and acutest perceptions of beauty. The only beauty that is worth anything, is the beauty perceived in sincerity, and here again the secret lies in resolutely

abstaining from laying down laws, from judging, from condemning. The victory always remains with those who admire, rather than with those who deride, and the power of appreciating is worth any amount of the power of despising.

And now we pass to the third and most intangible region of the spirit, the region that I will call the mystical region. This is in a sense akin to the æsthetic region, because it partly consists in the appreciation of beauty in ethical things. Here the danger of the vivid personality is to let his preferences be his guide, and to contemn certain types of character, certain qualities, certain modes of thought, certain points of view. Here again one's duty is plain. It is the resolute avoidance of the critical attitude, the attempt to disentangle the golden thread, the nobility, the purity, the strength, the intensity, that may underlie characters and views that do not superficially appeal to oneself. The philosopher need not seek the society of uncongenial persons: such a practice is a useless expenditure of time and energy; but no one can avoid a certain contact with dissimilar natures, and the aim of the philosopher must be to try and do sympathetic justice to them, to seek earnestly for points of contact, rather than to attempt to emphasise differences. For instance, if the philosopher is thrown into

the society of a man who can talk nothing but motor jargon or golfing shop—I select the instances of the conversation that is personally to me the dreariest—he need not attempt to talk of golf or motors, and he is equally bound not to discourse of his own chosen intellectual interests; but he ought to endeavour to find a common region, in which he can meet the golfer or the motorist without mutual dreariness.

Perhaps it may be thought that I have drifted out of the mystical region, but it is not so, for the relations of human beings with each other appear to me to belong to this region. The strange affinities and hostilities of temperament, the inexplicable and undeniable thing called charm, the attraction and repulsion of character—all this is in the mystical region of the spirit, the region of intuition and instinct, which is a far stronger, more vital, and more general region than the intellectual or the artistic. And further, there comes the deepest intuition of all, the relation of the human spirit to its Maker, its originating cause. Whether this relation can be a direct one is a matter for each person to decide from his own experience; but perhaps the only two things of which a human being can be said to be absolutely conscious are his own identity, and the existence of a controlling Power outside of

him. And here lies the deepest danger of all, that a man should attempt to limit or define his conception of the Power that originated him, by his own preferences. The deepest mystery of all lies in the conviction, which seems to be inextricably rooted in the human spirit, namely, the instinct to distinguish between the impulses which we believe emanate from God, and the impulses which we believe emanate from ourselves. It is incontestable that the greater part of the human race have the instinct that in following beneficent, unselfish, noble impulses they are following the will of their Maker; but that in yielding to cruel, sensual, low impulses they are acting contrary to the will of the Creator. And this intuition is one which many of us do not doubt, though it is a principle which cannot be scientifically proved. Indeed, it is incontestable that, though we believe the will of God to be on the side of what is good, yet He puts many obstacles, or permits them to be put, in the way of the man who desires to act rightly.

The only way, I believe, in this last region, in which we can hope to improve, to win victories, is the way of a quiet and sincere submission. It is easy to submit to the Will of God when it sends us joy and peace, when it makes us courageous, high-hearted, and just. The difficulty

is to acquiesce when He sends us adversity, ill-health, suffering; when He permits us to sin, or if that is a faithless phrase, does not grant us strength to resist. But we must try to be patient, we must try to interpret the value of suffering, the meaning of failure, the significance of shame. Perhaps it may be urged that this too is a temptation of egotism in another guise, and that we grow thus to conceive of ourselves as filling too large a space in the mind of God. But unless we do this, we can only conceive of ourselves as the victims of God's inattention or neglect, which is a wholly despairing thought.

In one sense we must be egotistic, if self-knowledge is egotism. We must try to take the measure of our faculties, and we must try to use them. But while we must wisely humiliate ourselves before the majesty of God, the vast and profound scheme of the Universe, we must at the same time believe that we have our place and our work; that God indeed purposely set us where we find ourselves; and among the complicated difficulties of sense, of temptation, of unhappiness, of failure, we must try to fix our eyes humbly and faithfully upon the best, and seek to be worthy of it. We must try not to be self-sufficient, but to be humble and yet diligent.

I do not think that we practise this simple resignation often enough; it is astonishing how the act of placing our own will as far as possible in unison with the Will of God restores our tranquillity.

It was only a short time ago that I was walking alone among fields and villages. It was one of those languid days of early spring, when the frame and the mind alike seem unstrung and listless. The orchards were white with flower, and the hedges were breaking into fresh green. I had just returned to my work after a brief and delightful holiday, and was overshadowed with the vague depression that the resumption of work tends to bring to anxious minds. I entered a little ancient church that stood open; it was full of sunlight, and had been tenderly decked with an abundance of spring flowers. If I had been glad at heart it would have seemed a sweet place, full of peace and beautiful mysteries. But it had no voice, no message for me. I was overshadowed too by a sad anxiety about one whom I loved, who was acting perversely and unworthily. There came into my mind a sudden gracious thought to commit myself to the heart of God, not to disguise my weakness and anxiety, not to ask that the load should be lightened, but that I might endure His will to the uttermost.

In a moment came the strength I sought; no lightening of the load, but a deeper serenity, a desire to bear it faithfully The very fragrance of the flowers seemed to mingle like a sweet incense with my vow. The old walls whispered of patience and hope. I do not know where the peace that then settled upon me came from, but not, it seemed, out of the slender resources of my own vexed spirit.

But after all, the wonder is, in this mysterious world, not that there is so much egotism abroad, but that there is so little! Considering the narrow space, the little cage of bones and skin, in which our spirit is confined, like a fluttering bird, it often astonished me to find how much of how many people's thoughts is not given to themselves, but to their work, their friends, their families.

The simplest and most practical cure for egotism, after all, is resolutely to suppress public manifestations of it; and it is best to overcome it as a matter of good manners, rather than as a matter of religious principle. One does not want people to be impersonal; all one desires to feel is that their interest and sympathy are not, so to speak, tethered by the leg, and only able to hobble in a small and trodden circle. One does not want people to suppress their personality, but to be ready to compare it with the personalities of others,

rather than to refer other personalities to the standard of their own; to be generous and expansive, if possible, and if that is not possible, or not easy, to be prepared, at least, to take such deliberate steps as all can take, in the right direction. We can all force ourselves to express interest in the tastes and idiosyncrasies of others, we can ask questions, we can cultivate relations. The one way in which we can all of us improve, is to commit ourselves to a course of action from which we shall be ashamed to draw back. Many people who would otherwise drift into self-regarding ways do this when they marry. They may marry for egotistical reasons; but once inside the fence, affection and duty and the amazing experience of having children of their own give them the stimulus they need. But even the most helpless celibate has only to embark upon relations with others, to find them multiply and increase. After all, egotism has little to do with the forming or holding of strong opinions, or even with the intentness with which we pursue our aims. The dog is the intentest of all animals, and throws himself most eagerly into his pursuits, but he is also the least egotistical and the most sympathetic of creatures. Egotism resides more in a kind of proud isolation, in a species of contempt for the opinions and aims of others. It is not, as a rule, the most success-

ful men who are the most egotistical. The most uncompromising egotist I know is a would-be literary man, who has the most pathetic belief in the interest and significance of his own very halting performances, a belief which no amount of rejection or indifference can shake, and who has hardly a good word for the books of other writers. I have sometimes thought that it is in his case a species of mental disease, because he is an acute critic of all work except his own. Doctors will indeed tell one that transcendent egotism is very nearly allied to insanity; but in ordinary cases a little common sense and a little courtesy will soon suppress the manifestations of the tendency, if a man can only realise that the forming of decided opinions is the cheapest luxury in the world, while a licence to express them uncompromisingly is one of the most expensive. Perhaps the hardest kind of egotism to cure, is the egotism that is combined with a deferential courtesy, and the power of displaying a superficial sympathy, because an egotist of this type so seldom encounters any checks which would convince him of his fault. Such people, if they have natural ability, often achieve great success, because they pursue their own ambitions with relentless perseverance, and have the tact to do it without appearing to interfere with the designs of others. They bide their

time ; they are all consideration and delicacy ; they are never importunate or tiresome ; if they fail, they accept the failure as though it were a piece of undeserved good fortune ; they never have a grievance ; they simply wipe up the spilt milk, and say no more about it ; baffled at one point, they go quietly round the corner, and continue their quest. They never for a moment really consider any one's interests except their own ; even their generous impulses are deliberately calculated for the sake of the artistic effect. Such people make it hard to believe in disinterested virtue ; yet they join with the meek in inheriting the earth, and their prosperity seems the sign of Divine approval.

But apart from the definite steps that the ordinary, moderately interesting, moderately successful man may take, in the direction of a cure for egotism, the best cure, after all, for all faults, is a humble desire to be different. That is the most transforming power in the world ; we may fail a thousand times, but as long as we are ashamed of our failure, as long as we do not helplessly acquiesce, as long as we do not try to comfort ourselves for it by a careful parade of our other virtues, we are in the pilgrim's road. It is a childish fault, after all. I watched to-day a party of children at play. One detestable little boy, the clumsiest and most in-

capable of the party, spent the whole time in climbing up a step and jumping from it, while he entreated all the others to see how far he could project himself. There was not a child there who could not have jumped twice as far, but they were angelically patient and sympathetic with the odious little wretch. It seemed to me a sad, small parable of what we so many of us are engaged all our lives long in doing. The child had no eyes for and no thoughts of the rest; he simply reiterated his ridiculous performance, and claimed admiration. There came into my mind that exquisite and beautiful ode, the work too, strange to say, of a transcendent egotist, Coventry Patmore, and the prayer he made:

> "Ah, when at last we lie with trancèd breath,
> Not vexing Thee in death,
> And Thou rememberest of what toys
> We made our joys,
> How weakly understood
> Thy great commanded good,
> Then, fatherly not less
> Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
> Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,
> 'I will be sorry for their childishness.'"

This is where we may leave our problem; leave it, that is to say, if we have faithfully struggled with it, if we have tried to amend ourselves and

to encourage others ; if we have done all this, and reached a point beyond which progress seems impossible. But we must not fling our problems and perplexities, as we are apt to do, upon the knees of God, the very instant they begin to bewilder us, as children bring a tangled skein, or a toy bent crooked, to a nurse. We must not, I say ; and yet, after all, I am not sure that it is not the best and simplest way of all !

IX

EDUCATION

I SAID that I was a public-school master for nearly twenty years; and now that it is over I sometimes sit and wonder, rather sadly, I am afraid, what we were all about.

We were a strictly classical school; that is to say, all the boys in the school were practically specialists in classics, whether they had any aptitude for them or not. We shoved and rammed in a good many other subjects into the tightly packed budget we called the curriculum. But it was not a sincere attempt to widen our education, or to give boys a real chance to work at the things they cared for; it was only a compromise with the supposed claims of the public, in order that we might try to believe that we taught things we did not really teach. We had an enormous and elaborate machine; the boys worked hard, and the masters were horribly overworked. The whole thing whizzed,

banged, grumbled, and hummed like a factory; but very little education was the result. It used to go to my heart to see a sparkling stream of bright, keen, lively little boys arrive, half after half, ready to work, full of interest, ready to listen breathlessly to anything that struck their fancy, ready to ask questions—such excellent material, I used to think. At the other end used to depart a slow river of cheerful and conventional boys, well-dressed, well-mannered, thoroughly nice, reasonable, sensible, and good-humoured creatures, but knowing next to nothing, without intellectual interests, and, indeed, honestly despising them. I do not want to exaggerate; and I will frankly confess that there were always a few well-educated boys among them; but these were boys of real ability, with an aptitude for classics. And as providing a classical education, the system was effective, though cumbrous; hampered and congested by the other subjects, which were well enough taught, but which had no adequate time given to them, and intruded upon the classics without having opportunity to develop themselves. It is a melancholy picture, but the result certainly was that intellectual cynicism was the note of the place.

The pity of it is that the machinery was all there; cheerful industry among masters and boys

alike; but the whole thing frozen and chilled, partly by the congestion of subjects, partly by antiquated methods.

Moreover, to provide a classical education for the best boys, everything else was sacrificed. The boys were taught classics, not on the literary method, but on the academic method, as if they were all to enter for triposes and scholarships, and to end by becoming professors. Instead of simply reading away at interesting and beautiful books, and trying to cover some ground, a great quantity of pedantic grammar was taught; time was wasted in trying to make the boys compose in both Latin and Greek, when they had no vocabulary, and no knowledge of the languages. It was like setting children of six and seven to write English in the style of Milton and Carlyle.

The solution is a very obvious one; it is, at all costs to simplify, and to relieve pressure. The staple of education should be French, easy mathematics, history, geography, and popular science. I would not even begin Latin or Greek at first. Then, when the first stages were over, I would have every boy with any special gift put to a single subject, in which he should try to make real progress, but so that there would be time to keep up the simpler subjects as well. The result would be that when a boy had

finished his course, he would have some one subject which he could reasonably be expected to have mastered up to a certain point. He would have learnt classics, or mathematics, or history, or modern languages, or science, thoroughly; while all might hope to have a competent knowledge of French, English, history, easy mathematics, and easy science. Boys who had obviously no special aptitude would be kept on at the simple subjects. And if the result was only that a school sent out boys who could read French easily, and write simple French grammatically, who knew something of modern history and geography, could work out sums in arithmetic, and had some conception of elementary science—well, they would, I believe, be very fairly educated boys.

The reason why intellectual cynicism sets in, is because the boys, as they go on, feel that they have mastered nothing. They have been set to compose in Greek and Latin and French; the result is that they have no power of composing in any of these languages, when they might have learnt to compose in one. Meanwhile, they have not had time to read any English to speak of, or to be practised in writing it. They know nothing of their own history or of modern geography; and the blame is not

with them if they find all knowledge arid and unattractive.

I would try all sorts of experiments. I would make boys do easy précis-writing; to give a set of boys a simple printed correspondence and tell them to analyse it, would be to give them a task in which the dullest would find some amusement. I should read a story aloud, or a short episode of history, and require them to re-tell it in their own words. Or I would relate a simple incident, and make them write it in French; make them write letters in French. And it would be easy thus to make one subject play into another, because they could be made to give an account in French of something that they had done in science or history.

At present each of the roads—Latin, Greek, French, mathematics, science—leads off in a separate direction, and seems to lead nowhere in particular.

The defenders of the classical system say that it fortifies the mind and makes it a strong and vigorous instrument. Where is the proof of it? It is true that it fortifies and invigorates minds which have, to start with, plenty of grip and interest; but pure classics are, as the results abundantly prove, too hard a subject for ordinary minds, and they are taught in too abstruse

and elaborate a way. If it were determined by the united good sense of educational authorities that Latin and Greek must be retained at all costs, then the only thing to do would be to sacrifice all other subjects, and to alter all the methods of teaching the classics. I do not think it would be a good solution; but it would be better than the present system of intellectual starvation.

The truth is that the present results are so poor that any experiments are justified. The one quality which you can depend upon in boys is interest, and interest is ruthlessly sacrificed. When I used to press this fact upon my sterner colleagues, they would say that I only wanted to make things amusing, and that the result would be that we should only turn out amateurs. But amateurs are at least better than barbarians; and my complaint is that the majority of the boys are not turned out even professionally equipped in the elaborate subjects they are supposed to have been taught.

The same melancholy thing goes on in the older Universities. The classics are retained as a subject in which all must qualify; and the education provided for the ordinary passman is of a contemptible, smattering kind; it is really no education at all. It gives no grip, or vigour,

or stimulus. Here again no one takes any interest in the average man. If the more liberal residents try to get rid of the intolerable tyranny of compulsory classics, a band of earnest, conventional people streams up from the country and outvotes them, saying solemnly, and obviously believing, that education is in danger. The truth is that the intellectual education of the average Englishman is sacrificed to an antiquated humanist system, administered by unimaginative and pedantic people.

The saddest part of it all is that we have, most of us, so little idea of what we want to effect by education. My own theory is a simple one. I think that we ought first of all to equip boys, as far as we can, to play a useful part in the world. Such a theory is decried by educational theorists as being utilitarian; but if education is not to be useful, we had better close our schools at once. The idealist says, "Never mind the use; get the best educational instrument for the training of the mind, and, when you have finished your work, the mind will be bright and strong, and capable of discharging any labour." That is a beautiful theory; but it is not borne out by results; and one of the reasons of the profound disbelief which is rapidly spreading in the country with regard to our

public schools, is that we send out so many boys, not only without intellectual life, but not even capable of humble usefulness. These theorists continue to talk of classics as a splendid gymnastic, but in their hands it becomes a rack; instead of leaving the limbs supple and well knit, they are strained, disjointed, and feeble. Even the flower of our classical system are too often left without any original power of expression; critical, fastidious minds, admiring erudition, preferring the elucidation of second-rate authors to the study of the best. A man who reads Virgil for pleasure is a better result of a system of education than one who re-edits Tibullus. Instead of having original thoughts, and a style of their own to express them in, these high classicists are left with a profound knowledge of the style and usage of ancient authors, a thing not to be undervalued as a step in a progress, but still essentially an anteroom of the mind.

The further task that lies before us educators, when we have trained a mind to be useful, consists in the awakening, in whatever regions may be possible, of the soul. By this I do not mean the ethical soul, but the spirit of fine perception of beauty, of generous admiration for what is noble and true and high. And here I am sure

that we fail, and fail miserably. For one thing, these great classicists make the mistake of thinking that only through literature, and, what is more, the austere literature of Greece and Rome, can this sense be developed. I myself have a deep admiration for Greek literature. I think it one of the brightest flowers of the human spirit, and I think it well that any boy with a real literary sense should be brought into contact with it. I do not think so highly of Latin literature. There are very few writers of the first rank. Virgil is, of course, one; and Horace is a splendid craftsman, but not a high master of literature. There is hardly any prose in Latin fit for boys to read. Cicero is diffuse, and often affords little more than small-talk on abstract topics; Tacitus a brilliant but affected prosateur, Cæsar a dull and uninspiring author. But to many boys the path to literary appreciation cannot lie through Latin, or even Greek, because the old language hangs like a veil between them and the thought within. To some boys the enkindling of the intellectual soul comes through English literature, to some through history, to some through a knowledge of other lands, which can be approached by geography. To some through art and music; and of these two things we trifle with the latter and hardly touch upon

the former. I cannot see that a knowledge of the lives, the motives, the performances of artists is in itself a less valuable instrument of education than a knowledge of the lives, motives, and performances of writers, even though they be Greek.

What our teachers fail in—and the most enthusiastic often fail most hopelessly—is in sympathy and imagination. They cannot conceive that what moves, touches, and inspires themselves may have no meaning for boys with a different type of mind.

The result of our education can be well reviewed by one who, like myself, after wrestling, often very sorrowfully, with the problems of school education, comes up to a university and gets to know something of these boys at a later stage. Many of them are fine, vigorous fellows; but they often tend to look upon their work as a disagreeable necessity, which they do conscientiously, expecting nothing in particular from it. They play games ardently, and fill their hours of leisure with talk about them. Yet one discerns in mind after mind the germs of intellectual things, undeveloped and bewildered. Many of them have an interest in something, but they are often ashamed to talk about it. They have a deep horror of being supposed to be superior; they listen politely to talk about

books and pictures, conscious of ignorance, not ill-disposed to listen; but it is all an unreal world to them.

I am all for hard and strenuous work. I do not at all wish to make work slipshod and dilettante. I would raise the standards of simple education, and force boys to show that they are working honestly. I want energy and zeal above everything. But my honest belief is that you cannot get strenuous and zealous work unless you also have interest and belief in work. At present, education as conducted in our public-school and university system appears to me to be neither utilitarian nor intellectual. It aims at being intellectual first and utilitarian afterwards, and it misses both.

Whether anything can be done on a big scale to help us out of the poor tangle in which we are involved, I do not know. I fear not. I do not think that the time is ripe. I do not believe that great movements can be brought about by prophets, however enlightened their views, however vigorous their personalities, unless there is a corresponding energy below. An individual may initiate and control a great force of public opinion; I do not think he can originate it. There is certainly a vague and widespread discontent with our present results; but it is all

a negative opinion, a dissatisfaction with what is being done. The movement must have a certain positive character before it can take shape. There must arise a desire and a respect for intellectual things, a certain mental tone, which is wanting. At present, public opinion only indicates that the rising generation is not well trained, and that boys, after going through an elaborate education, seem to be very little equipped for practical life. There is no complaint that boys are made unpractical; the feeling rather is that they are turned out healthy, well-drilled creatures, fond of games, manly, obedient, but with a considerable aversion to settling down to work, and with a firm resolve to extract what amusement they can out of life. All that is, I feel, perfectly true; but there is little demand on the part of parents that boys should have intellectual interests or enthusiasms for the things of the mind. What teachers ought to aim at is to communicate something of this enthusiasm, by devising a form of education which should appeal to the simpler forms of intellectual curiosity, instead of starving boys upon an ideal of inaccessible dignity. I do not for a moment deny that those who defend the old classical tradition have a high intellectual ideal. But it is an unpractical ideal, and takes no account of the plain facts of experience.

The result is that we teachèrs have forfeited confidence; and we must somehow or other regain it. We are tolerated, as all ancient and respectable things are tolerated. We have become a part of the social order, and we have still the prestige of wealth and dignity. But what wealthy people ever dream nowadays of building and endowing colleges on purely literary lines? All the buildings which have arisen of late in my University are either buildings for scientific purposes or clerical foundations for ecclesiastical ends. The vitality of our literary education is slowly fading out of it. This lack of vitality is not so evident until you go a little way beneath the surface. Classical proficiency is still liberally rewarded by scholarships and fellowships; and while the classical tradition remains in our schools, there are a good many men, who intend to be teachers, who enter for classical examinations. But where we fail grievously is in our provision for average men; they are provided with feeble examinations in desultory and diffuse subjects, in which a high standard is not required. It is difficult to imagine a condition of greater vacuity than that in which a man leaves the University after taking a pass degree. No one has endeavoured to do anything for him, or to cultivate his intelligence in any line And yet these

are our parents in the next generation. And the only way in which we stifle mental revolt is by leaving our victims in such a condition of mental abjectness and intellectual humility, that it does not even occur to them to complain of how unjustly they have been treated. After all, we have interfered with them so little that they have contrived to have a good time at the University. They have made friends, played games, and lived a healthy life enough; they resolve that their boys shall have a good time too, if possible; and so the poor educational farce is played on from generation to generation. It is melancholy to read the sonnet which Tennyson wrote, more than sixty years ago, a grave and bitter indictment of Cambridge—

> "Because you do profess to teach,
> And teach us nothing, feeding not the heart."

That is the mistake: we do not feed the heart; we are too professional; we concern ourselves with methods and details; we swallow blindly the elaborate tradition under which we have ourselves been educated; we continue to respect the erudite mind, and to decry the appreciative spirit as amateurish and dilettante. We continue to think that a boy is well trained in history if he has a minute knowledge of the sequence of events—that

is, of course, a necessary part of the equipment of a professor or a teacher; but here again lies one of the fatal fallacies of our system—that we train from the professorial point of view. Omniscience is not even desirable in the ordinary mind. A boy who has appreciated the force of a few great historical characters, who has learnt generous insight into the unselfish patriotism that wins the great victories of the world, who can see the horror of tyranny and the wrongs done to humanity in the name of authority, who has seen how a nation in earlier stages is best ruled by an enlightened despotism, until it has learnt vigour and honesty and truth, who has learnt to perceive that political agitation only survives in virtue of the justice which underlies its demands—a boy, I say, who has been taught to perceive such things, has learnt the lesson of history in a way which a student crammed with dates and facts may have wholly missed.

The truth is that we do not know what we are aiming at. Our school and university systems aim at present at an austere standard of mental discipline, and then fail to enforce it, by making inevitable concessions to the mental weakness inherited from long generations trained upon the system of starvation. The system, indeed, too often reminds me of an old picture

in *Punch*, of genteel poverty dining in state; in a room hung with portraits, attended by footmen, two attenuated persons sit, while a silver cover is removed from a dish containing a roasted mouse. The resources that ought to be spent on a wholesome meal are wasted in keeping up an ideal of state. Of course there is something noble in all sacrifice of personal comfort and health to a dignified ideal; but it is our business at present to fill the dish rather than to insist on the cover being of silver.

One very practical proof of the disbelief which the public has in education is that, while the charges of public schools have risen greatly in the last fifty years, the margin is all expended in the comfort of boys, and in opportunities for athletic exercises; while masters, at all but a very few public schools, are still so poorly paid that it is impossible for the best men to adopt the profession, unless they have an enthusiasm which causes them to put considerations of personal comfort aside. It is only too melancholy to observe at the University that the men of vigour and force tend to choose the Civil Service or the Bar in preference to educational work. I cannot wonder at it. The drudgery of falling in with the established system, of teaching things in which there is no interest to be communicated,

of insisting on details in the value of which one does not believe, is such that few people, except unambitious men, who have no special mental bent, adopt the profession; and these only because the imparting of the slender accomplishments that they have gained is an obvious and simple method of earning a livelihood.

The blame must, I fear, fall first upon the Universities. I am not speaking of the education there provided for the honour men, which is often excellent of its kind; though it must be confessed that the keenest and best enthusiasm seems to me there to be drifting away from the literary side of education. But while an old and outworn humanist tradition is allowed to prevail, while the studies of the average passman are allowed to be diffuse, desultory, and aimless, and of a kind from which it is useless to expect either animation or precision, so long will a blight rest upon the education of the country. While boys of average abilities continue to be sent to the Universities, and while the Universities maintain the classical fence, so long will the so-called modern sides at schools continue to be collections of more or less incapable boys. And in decrying modern sides, as even headmasters of great schools have been often known to do, it is very seldom stated that the average of ability in these

departments tends to be so low that even the masters who teach in them teach without faith or interest.

It may be thought of these considerations that they resemble the attitude of Carlyle, of whom FitzGerald said that he had sat for many years pretty comfortably in his study at Chelsea, scolding all the world for not being heroic, but without being very precise in telling them how. But this is a case where individual action is out of the question; and if I am asked to name a simple reform which would have an effect, I would suggest that a careful revision of the education of passmen at our Universities is the best and most practical step to take.

And, for the schools, the only solution possible is that the directors of secondary education should devise a real and simple form of curriculum. If they whole-heartedly believe in the classics as the best possible form of education, then let them realise that the classics form a large and complicated subject, which demands the *whole* of the energies of boys. Let them resist utilitarian demands altogether, and bundle all other subjects, except classics, out of the curriculum, so that classics may, at all events, be learnt thoroughly and completely. At present they make large and reluctant concessions to utilitarian demands, and

spoil the effect of the classics to which they cling, and in which they sincerely believe, by admitting modern subjects to the curriculum in deference to the clamour of utilitarians. A rigid system, faithfully administered, would be better than a slatternly compromise. Of course, one would like to teach all boys everything if it were possible! But the holding capacity of tender minds is small, and a few subjects thoroughly taught are infinitely better than a large number of subjects flabbily taught.

I say, quite honestly, that I had rather have the old system of classics pure and simple, taught with relentless accuracy, than the present hotch-potch. But I earnestly hope myself that the pressure of the demand for modern subjects is too strong to be resisted.

It seems to me that, when the whole world is expanding and thrilling with new life all around us, it is an intolerable mistake not to bring the minds of boys in touch with the modern spirit. The history of Greece and Rome may well form a part of modern education; but we want rather to bring the minds of those who are being educated into contact with the Greek and Roman spirit, as part of the spirit of the world, than to make them acquainted with the philological and syntactical peculiarities of the two languages. It

may be said that we cannot come into contact with the Greek and the Roman spirit except through reading their respective literatures; but if that is the case, how can a system of teaching classics be defended which never brings the vast majority of the boys, who endure it, in contact with the literature or the national spirit of the Greeks and Romans at all? I do not think that classical teachers can sincerely maintain that the average product of a classical school has any real insight into, or familiarity with, either the language or the spirit of these two great nations.

And if that is true of average boys educated on this system, what is it that classical teachers profess to have given them? They will say grip, vigour, the fortified mind. But where is the proof of it? If I saw classically educated boys flinging themselves afterwards with energy and ardour into modern literature, history, philosophy, science, I should be the first to concur in the value of the system. But I see, instead, intellectual cynicism, intellectual apathy, an absorbing love of physical exercise, an appetite for material pleasures, a distaste for books and thought. I do not say that these tendencies would at once yield to a simpler and more enlightened system of education; but the results of the present system seem to me so negative, so unsatisfactory, as to

justify, and indeed necessitate, the trying of educational experiments. It is terrible to see the patient acquiescence, the humble conscientiousness with which the present system is administered. It is pathetic to see so much labour expended upon an impossible task. There is something, of course, morally impressive about the courage and loyalty of those who stick to a sinking ship, and attempt to bale out with teacups the inrush of the overwhelming tide. But one cannot help feeling that too much is at stake; that year by year the younger generation, which ought to be sent out alive to intellectual interests of every kind, in a period which is palpitating with problems and thrilled by wonderful surprises, is being starved and cramped by an obstinate clinging to an old tradition, to a system which reveals its inadequacy to all who pass by; or, rather, our boys are being sacrificed to a weak compromise between two systems, the old and the new, which are struggling together. The new system cannot at present eject the old, and the old can only render the new futile without exercising its own complete influence.

The best statesmanship in the world is not to break rudely with old traditions, but to cause the old to run smoothly into the new. My own sincere belief is that it is not too late to attempt

this; but that if the subject continues to be shelved, if our educational authorities refuse to consider the question of reform, the growing dissatisfaction will reach such a height that the old system will be swept away root and branch, and that many venerable and beautiful associations will thereby be sacrificed. And with all my heart do I deprecate this, believing, as I do, that a wise continuity, a tendency to temperate reform, is one of the best notes of the English character. We have a great and instinctive tact in England for avoiding revolutions, and for making freedom broaden slowly down; that is what, one ventures to hope, may be the issue of the present discontent. But I would rather have a revolution, with all its destructive agencies, than an unintelligent and oppressive tyranny.

X

AUTHORSHIP

I HAVE been sometimes consulted by young aspirants in literature as to the best mode of embarking upon the profession of letters; and if my inquirer has confessed that he will be obliged to earn his living, I have always replied, dully but faithfully, that the best way to realise his ambition is to enter some other profession without delay. Writing is indeed the most delightful thing in the world, if one has not to depend upon it for a livelihood; and the truth is that, if a man has the real literary gift, there are very few professions which do not afford a margin of time sufficient for him to indulge what is the happiest and simplest of hobbies. Sometimes the early impulse has no root, and withers; but if, after a time, a man finds that his heart is entirely in his writing, and if he feels that he may without imprudence give himself to the practice of the beloved art, then he may formally adopt it as a profession. But he must not hope for much

monetary reward. A successful writer of plays may make a fortune, a novelist or a journalist of the first rank may earn a handsome income; but to achieve conspicuous mundane success in literature, a certain degree of good fortune is almost more important than genius, or even than talent. Ability by itself, even literary ability of a high order, is not sufficient; it is necessary to have a vogue, to create or satisfy a special demand, to hit the taste of the age. But the writer of *belles-lettres*, the literary writer pure and simple, can hardly hope to earn a living wage, unless he is content to do, and indeed fortunate enough to obtain, a good deal of hackwork as well. He must be ready to write reviews and introductions; to pour out occasional articles, to compile, to edit, to select; and the chances are that if his livelihood depends upon his labour, he will have little of the tranquillity, the serenity, the leisure, upon the enjoyment of which the quality of the best work depends. John Addington Symonds makes a calculation, in one of his published letters, to the effect that his entire earnings for the years in which he had been employed in writing his history of the Italian Renaissance, had been at the rate of about £100 a year, from which probably nearly half had to be subtracted for inevitable incidental expenses, such as books and

travelling. The conclusion is that unless a man has private resources, or a sufficiently robust constitution to be able to carry on his literary work side by side with his professional work, he can hardly afford to turn his attention to *belles-lettres*.

Nowadays literature has become a rather fashionable pursuit than otherwise. Times have changed since Gray refused to accept money for his publications, and gave it to be understood that he was an eccentric gentleman who wrote solely for his own amusement ; since the inheritor of Rokeby found among the family portraits of the magnates that adorned his walls a picture of the novelist Richardson, and was at the pains of adding a ribbon and a star, in order to turn it into a portrait of Sir Robert Walpole, that he might free his gallery from such degrading associations.

But now a social personage is hardly ashamed of writing a book, of travels, perhaps, or even of literary appreciations, so long as it is untainted by erudition ; he is not averse to publishing a volume of mild lyrics, or a piece of simple fiction, just to show how easy it is, and what he could do, if only, as Charles Lamb said, he had the mind. It adds a pleasant touch of charming originality to a great lady if she can bring out a little book. Such compositions are indubitably books ; they generally have a title-page, an emotional dedica-

tion, an ultra-modest preface, followed by a certain number of pages of undeniable print. It is common enough too, at a big dinner-party, to meet three or four people, without the least professional dinginess, who have written books. Mr. Winston Churchill said the other day, with much humour, that he could not reckon himself a professional author because he had only written five books—the same number as Moses.[1] And I am far from decrying the pleasant labours of these amateurs. The writing of such books as I have described has been a real amusement to the author, not entailing any particular strain; the sweet pride of authorship enlarges one's sympathies, and gives an agreeable glow to life. No inconvenient rivalry results. The little volumes just flutter into the sunshine, like gauzy flies from some tiny cocoon, and spread their slender wings very gracefully in the sun.

I would not, then, like some austere critics, forbid such leisurely writers as I have described to indulge in the pleasant diversion of writing books. There are reviewers who think it a sacred duty to hunt and chase these amiable and well-meaning amateurs out of the field, as though they had trespassed upon some sacred enclosure. I

[1] This sentence was, of course, written before the publication by Mr. Churchill of the Life of his father, Lord Randolph Churchill.

do not think that it is necessary or even kind to do this. I would rather regard literature as a kind of Tom Tiddler's ground, where there is gold as well as silver to be picked up. Amateurs tend, it is true, rather to scatter gold and silver in the field of literature than to acquire it; and I had just as soon, after all, that they should lavish their superfluous wealth there, to be picked up by honest publishers, as that they should lavish it in other regions of unnecessary expenditure. It is not a crime, when all is said, to write or even to print an inferior book; I would indeed go further, and say that writing in any shape is at worst a harmless diversion; and I see no reason why people should be discouraged from such diversion, any more than that they should be discouraged from practising music, or making sketches in water-colour, because they only attain a low standard of execution in such pursuits. Indeed, I think that hours devoted to the production of inferior literature, by persons of leisure, are quite as well bestowed as hours spent in golfing and motoring; to engage in the task of writing a book implies a certain sympathy with intellectual things; and I am disposed to applaud and encourage anything which increases intellectual appreciation in our country at the present time. There is not too much of it abroad; and I care very little how it is acquired,

if only it is acquired. The only way in which these amateurs can be tiresome is if they insist upon reading their compositions aloud in a domestic circle, or if they request one to read a published book and give them a candid opinion. I once stayed with a worthy country gentleman who, evening after evening, after we had returned from shooting, insisted on reading aloud in the smoking-room, with solemn zest, the novel on which he was engaged. It was heavy work! The shooting was good, but I am not sure that it was not dearly purchased at the price. The plot of the book was intricate, the characters numerous; and I found it almost impossible to keep the *dramatis personæ* apart. But I did not grudge my friend the pleasure he took in his composition; I only grudged the time I was obliged to spend in listening to it. The novel was not worth writing from the point of view of its intrinsic merits; but it gave my old friend an occupation; he was never bored; he flew back to his book whenever he had an hour to spare. It saved him from dulness and *ennui*; it gave him, I doubt not, many a glowing hour of secret joy; it was an unmixed benefit to himself and his family that he had this indoors resource; it entailed no expense; it was simply the cheapest and most harmless hobby that it is possible to conceive.

It is characteristic of our nation to feel an imperative need for occupation. I suppose that there is no nation in the world which has so little capacity for doing nothing gracefully, and enjoying it, as the English. This characteristic is part of our strength, because it testifies to a certain child-like vitality. We are impatient, restless, unsatisfied. We cannot be happy unless we have a definite end in view. The result of this temperament is to be seen at the present time in the enormous and consuming passion for athletic exercise in the open air. We are not an intellectual nation, and we must do something; we are wealthy and secure, and, in default of regular work, we have got to organise our hours of leisure on the supposition that we have something to do. I have little doubt that if we became a more intellectual nation the change would be signalised by an immense output of inferior books, because we have not the student temperament, the gift of absorbing literature. We have a deep instinct for publicity. If we are athletically gifted, we must display our athletic prowess in public. If we have thoughts of our own, we must have a hearing; we look upon meditation, contemplation, conversation, the arts of leisurely living, as a waste of time; we are above all things practical.

But I would pass on to consider the case of

more serious writers; and I would begin by making a personal confession. My own occupations are mainly literary; and I would say frankly that there seems to me to be no pleasure comparable to the pleasure of writing. To find a congenial subject, and to express that subject as lucidly, as sincerely, as frankly as possible, appears to me to be the most delightful occupation in the world. Nature is full of exquisite sights and sounds, day by day; the stage of the world is crowded with interesting and fascinating personalities, rich in contrasts, in characteristics, in humour, in pathos. We are surrounded, the moment we pass outside of the complex material phenomena which surround us, by all kinds of wonderful secrets and incomprehensible mysteries. What is this strange pageant that unrolls itself before us from hour to hour? this panorama of night and day, sun and moon, summer and winter, joy and sorrow, life and death? We have all of us, like Jack Horner, our slice of pie to eat. Which of us does not know the delighted complacency with which we pull out the plums? The poet is silent of the moment when the plate is empty, when nothing is left but the stones; but that is no less impressive an experience.

The wonderful thing to me is, not that there is so much desire in the world to express our little

portion of the joy, the grief, the mystery of it all, but that there is so little. I wish with all my heart that there was more instinct for personal expression; Edward FitzGerald said that he wished we had more lives of obscure persons; one wants to know what other people are thinking and feeling about it all; what joys they anticipate, what fears they sustain, how they regard the end and cessation of life and perception, which waits for us all. The worst of it is that people are often so modest; they think that their own experience is so dull, so unromantic, so uninteresting. It is an entire mistake. If the dullest person in the world would only put down sincerely what he or she thought about his or her life, about work and love, religion and emotion, it would be a fascinating document. My only sorrow is that the amateurs of whom I have spoken above will not do this; they rather turn to external and impersonal impressions, relate definite things, what they see on their travels, for instance, describing just the things which any one can see. They tend to indulge in the melancholy labour of translation, or employ customary, familiar forms, such as the novel or the play. If only they would write diaries and publish them; compose imaginary letters; let one inside the house of self instead of keeping one wandering in the park! The real

interest of literature is the apprehending of other points of view; one spends an immense time in what is called society, in the pursuit of other people's views; but what a very little grain results from an intolerable deal of chaff! And all because people are conventional and not simple-minded; because they will not say what they think; indeed they will not as a rule try to find out what they do think, but prefer to traffic with the conventional counters. Yet what a refreshment it is to meet with a perfectly sincere person, who makes you feel that you are in real contact with a human being! This is what we ought to aim at in writing: at a perfectly sincere presentment of our thoughts. We cannot, of course, all of us hope to have views upon art, upon theology, upon politics, upon education, because we may not have any experience in these subjects; but we have all of us experience in life, in nature, in emotion, in religion; and to express what we feel, as sincerely as we can, is certainly useful to ourselves, because it clears our view, leads us not to confuse hopes with certainties, enables us to disentangle what we really believe from what we conventionally adopt.

Of course this cannot be done all at once; when we first begin to write, we find how difficult it is to keep the thread of our thoughts; we keep turning out of the main road to explore attractive

by-paths ; we cannot arrange our ideas. All writers who produce original work pass through a stage in which they are conscious of a throng of kindred notions, all more or less bearing on the central thought, but the movements of which they cannot wholly control. Their thoughts are like a turbulent crowd, and one's business is to drill them into an ordered regiment. A writer has to pass through a certain apprenticeship ; and the cure for this natural vagueness is to choose small precise subjects, to say all that we have in our minds about them, and to stop when we have finished ; not to aim at fine writing, but at definiteness and clearness.

I suppose people arrive at their end in different ways ; but my own belief is that, in writing, one cannot do much by correction. I believe that the best way to arrive at lucidity is by incessant practice ; we must be content to abandon and sacrifice faulty manuscripts altogether ; we ought not to fret over them and rewrite them. The two things that I have found to be of infinite service to myself, in learning to write prose, have been keeping a full diary, and writing poetry. The habit of diarising is easily acquired, and as soon as it becomes habitual, the day is no more complete without it than it is complete without a cold bath and regular meals. People say that they have not

time to keep a diary; but they would never say that they had not time to take a bath or to have their meals. A diary need not be a dreary chronicle of one's movements; it should aim rather at giving a salient account of some particular episode, a walk, a book, a conversation. It is a practice which brings its own reward in many ways; it is a singularly delightful thing to look at old diaries, to see how one was occupied, say, ten years ago; what one was reading, the people one was meeting, one's earlier point of view. And then, further, as I have said, it has the immense advantage of developing style; the subjects are ready to hand; and one may learn, by diarising, the art of sincere and frank expression.

And then there is the practice of writing poetry; there are certain years in the life of most people with a literary temperament, when poetry seems the most natural and desirable mode of self-expression. This impulse should be freely yielded to. The poetry need not be very good; I have no illusions, for instance, as to the merits of my own; but it gives one a copious vocabulary, it teaches the art of poise, of cadence, of choice in words, of picturesqueness. There comes a time when one abandons poetry, or is abandoned by it; and, after all, prose is the most real and natural form of expression. There arrives, in the case

of one who has practised poetical expression diligently, a wonderful sense of freedom, of expansiveness, of delight when he begins to use what has been material for poetry for the purposes of prose. Poetical expression is strictly conditioned by length of stanzas, dignity of vocabulary, and the painful exigencies of rhyme. How good are the days when one has escaped from all that tyranny, when one can say the things that stir the emotion, freely and liberally, in flowing phrases, without being brought to a stop by the severe fences of poetical form! The melody, the cadence, the rise and fall of the sentence, antithesis, contrast, mellifluous energy—these are the joys of prose; but there is nothing like the writing of verse to make them easy and instinctive.

A word may be said about style. Stevenson said that he arrived at flexibility of style by frank and unashamed imitation of other writers; he played, as he said, "the sedulous ape" to great authors. This system has its merits, but it also has its dangers. A sensitive literary temperament is apt to catch, to repeat, to perpetuate the charming mannerisms of great writers. I have sometimes had to write critical monographs on the work of great stylists. It is a perilous business! If for several months one studies the work of a contagious and delicate writer, critically and ap-

preciatively, one is apt to shape one's sentences with a dangerous resemblance to the cadences of the author whom one is supposed to be criticising. More than once, when my monograph has been completed, I have felt that it might almost have been written by the author under examination; and there is no merit in that. I am sure that one should not aim at practising a particular style. The one aim should be to present the matter as clearly, as vigorously, as forcibly as one can; if one does this sincerely, one's own personality will make the style; and thus I feel that people whose aim is to write vigorously should abstain from even reading authors whose style affects them strongly. Stevenson himself dared not read Livy; Pater confessed that he could not afford to read Stevenson; he added, that he did not consider his own style better than the style of Stevenson—rather the reverse—but he had his own theory, his own method of expression, deliberately adopted and diligently pursued. He therefore carefully refrained from reading an author whom he felt unconsciously compelled to imitate. The question of style, then, is one which a writer who desires originality should leave altogether alone. It must emerge of itself, or it is sure to lack distinctiveness. I saw once a curious instance of this. I knew a diligent writer, whose

hasty and unconsidered writings were forcible, lively, and lucid, penetrated by his own poetical and incisive personality; but he set no store by these writings, and if they were ever praised in his presence, he said that he was ashamed of them for being so rough. This man devoted many years to the composition of a great literary work. He took infinite pains with it; he concentrated whole sentences into epithets; he hammered and chiselled his phrases; he was for ever retouching and rewriting. But when the book at last appeared it was a complete disappointment. The thing was really unintelligible; it had no motion, no space about it; the reader had to devote heart-breaking thought to the exploration of a paragraph, and was as a rule only rewarded by finding that it was a simple thought, expressed with profound obscurity; whereas the object of the writer ought to be to express a profound and difficult thought clearly and lucidly. The only piece of literary advice that I have ever found to be of real and abiding use, is the advice I once heard given by Professor Seeley to a youthful essayist, who had involved a simple subject in mazes of irrelevant intricacy. "Don't be afraid," said the Professor, "of letting the bones show." That is the secret: a piece of literary art must not be merely dry bones; the skeleton must be overlaid with delicate

flesh and appropriate muscle; but the structure must be there, and it must be visible.

The perfection of lucid writing, which one sees in books such as Newman's *Apologia* or Ruskin's *Præterita*, seems to resemble a crystal stream, which flows limpidly and deliciously over its pebbly bed; the very shape of the channel is revealed; there are transparent glassy water-breaks over the pale gravel; but though the very stream has a beauty of its own, a beauty of liquid curve and delicate murmur, its chief beauty is in the exquisite transfiguring effect which it has over the shingle, the vegetation that glimmers and sways beneath the surface. How dry, how commonplace the pebbles on the edge look! How stiff and ruinous the plants from which the water has receded! But seen through the hyaline medium, what coolness, what romance, what secret and remote mystery, lingers over the tiny pebbles, the little reefs of rock, the ribbons of weed, that poise so delicately in the gliding stream! What a vision of unimagined peace, of cool refreshment, of gentle tranquillity, it all gives!

Thus it is with the transfiguring power of art, of style. The objects by themselves, in the commonplace light, in the dreary air, are trivial and unromantic enough; one can hold them in one's hand, one seems to have seen them a hundred

times before ; but, plunged beneath that clear and fresh medium, they have a unity, a softness, a sweetness which seem the result of a magical spell, an incommunicable influence ; they bring all heaven before the eyes ; they whisper the secrets of a region which is veritably there, which we can discern and enjoy, but the charm of which we can neither analyse nor explain ; we can only confess its existence with a grateful heart. One who devotes himself to writing should find, then, his chief joy in the practice of his art, not in the rewards of it ; publication has its merits, because it entails upon one the labour of perfecting the book as far as possible ; if one wrote without publication in view, one would be tempted to shirk the final labour of the file ; one would leave sentences incomplete, paragraphs unfinished ; and then, too, imperfect as reviews often are, it is wholesome as well as interesting to see the impression that one's work makes on others. If one's work is generally contemned, it is bracing to know that one fails in one's appeal, that one cannot amuse and interest readers. High literature has often met at first with unmerited neglect and even obloquy ; but to incur neglect and obloquy is not in itself a proof that one's standard is high and one's taste fastidious. Moreover, if one has done one's best, and expressed sincerely

what one feels and believes, one sometimes has the true and rare pleasure of eliciting a grateful letter from an unknown person, who has derived pleasure, perhaps even encouragement, from a book. These are some of the pleasant rewards of writing, and though one should not write with one's eye on the rewards, yet they may be accepted with a sober gratitude.

Of course there will come moods of discouragement to all authors, when they will ask themselves, as even Tennyson confesses that he was tempted to do, what, after all, it amounts to? The author must beware of rating his own possibilities too high. In looking back at one's own life, in trying to trace what are the things that have had a deep and permanent influence on one's character, how rarely is it possible to point to a particular book, and say, "That book gave me the message I most needed, made me take the right turn, gave me the requisite bias, the momentous impulse"? We tend to want to do things on too large a scale, to affect great masses of people, to influence numerous hearts. An author should be more than content if he finds he has made a difference to a handful of people, or given innocent pleasure to a small company. Only to those whose heart is high, whose patience is inexhaustible, whose vigour is great, whose emotion is

passionate, is it given to make a deep mark upon the age; and there is needed too the magical charm of personality, overflowing in "thoughts that breathe and words that burn." But we can all take a hand in the great game; and if the leading parts are denied us, if we are told off to sit among a row of supers, drinking and whispering on a bench, while the great characters soliloquise, let us be sure that we drain our empty cup with zest, and do our whispering with intentness; not striving to divert attention to ourselves, but contributing with all our might to the naturalness, the effectiveness of the scene.

XI

THE CRITICISM OF OTHERS

I WAS staying the other day in the house of an old friend, a public man, who is a deeply interesting character, energetic, able, vigorous, with very definite limitations. The only male guest in the house, it so happened, was also an old friend of mine, a serious man. One night, when we were all three in the smoking-room, our host rose, and excused himself, saying that he had some letters to write. When he was gone, I said to my serious friend: "What an interesting fellow our host is! He is almost more interesting because of the qualities that he does not possess, than because of the qualities that he does possess." My companion, who is remarkable for his power of blunt statement, looked at me gravely, and said: "If you propose to discuss our host, you must find some one else to conduct the argument; he is my friend, whom I esteem and love, and I am not in a position to criticise him." I laughed, and said: "Well, he is my friend, too, and *I* esteem and love him; and that is the very reason why I should

like to discuss him. Nothing that either you or I could say would make me love him less; but I wish to understand him. I have a very clear impression of him, and I have no doubt you have a very clear impression too; yet we should probably differ about him in many points, and I should like to see what light you could throw upon his character." My companion said: "No; it is inconsistent with my idea of loyalty to criticise my friends. Besides, you know I am an old-fashioned person, and I disapprove of criticising people altogether. I think it is a violation of the ninth commandment; I do not think we are justified in bearing false witness against our neighbour."

"But you beg the question," I said, "by saying '*false* witness.' I quite agree that to discuss people in a malicious spirit, or in a spirit of mockery, with the intention of exaggerating their faults and making a grotesque picture of their foibles, is wrong. But two just persons, such as you and I are, may surely talk over our friends, in what Mr. Chadband called a spirit of love?" My companion shook his head. "No," he said, "I think it is altogether wrong. Our business is to see the good points of our friends, and to be blind to their faults." "Well," I said, "then let us 'praise him soft and low, call him worthiest to be loved,' like

the people in 'The Princess.' You shall make a panegyric, and I will say 'Hear, hear!'" "You are making a joke out of it," said my companion, "and I shall stick to my principles—and you won't mind my saying," he went on, "that I think your tendency is to criticise people much too much. You are always discussing people's faults, and I think it ends in your having a lower estimate of human nature than is either kind or necessary. To-night, at dinner, it made me quite melancholy to hear the way in which you spoke of several of our best friends." "Not leaving Lancelot brave nor Galahad pure!" I said; "in fact you think that I behaved like the ingenious demon in the Acts, who always seems to me to have had a strong sense of humour. It was the seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, was it not, who tried to exorcise an evil spirit? But he 'leapt upon them and overcame them, so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded.' You mean that I use my friends like that, strip off their reputations, belabour them, and leave them without a rag of virtue or honour?" My companion frowned, and said: "Yes; that is more or less what I mean, though I think your illustration is needlessly profane. My idea is that we ought to make the best of people, and try as far as possible to be blind to their faults." "Unless their fault happens to be

criticism?" I said. My companion turned to me very solemnly, and said: "I think we ought not to be afraid, if necessary, of telling our friends about their faults; but that is quite a different thing from amusing oneself by discussing their faults with others." "Well," I said, "I believe that one is in a much better position to speak to people about their faults, if one knows them; and personally I think I arrive at a juster view both of my friends' faults and virtues by discussing them with others. I think one takes a much fairer view, by seeing the impression that one's friends make on other people; and I think that I generally arrive at admiring my friends more by seeing them reflected in the mind of another, than I do when they are merely reflected in my own mind. Besides, if one is possessed of critical faculties, it seems to me absurd to rule out one part of life, and that, perhaps, the most important—one's fellow-beings, I mean—and to say that one is not to exercise the faculty of criticism there. You would not think it wrong, for instance, to criticise books?" "No," said my companion, "certainly not. I think that it is not only legitimate, but a duty, to bring one's critical faculties to bear on books; it is one of the most valuable methods of self-education." "And yet books are nothing but an expression of an author's personality," I said.

"Would you go so far as to say that one has no business to criticise one's friends' books?" "You are only arguing for the sake of arguing," said my companion. "With books it is quite different; they are a public expression of a man's opinions, and consequently they are submitted to the world for criticism." "I confess," I said, "that I do not think the distinction is a real one. I feel sure one has a right to criticise a man's opinions, delivered in conversation; and I think that much of our lives is nothing but a more or less public expression of ourselves. Your position seems to me no more reasonable than if a man was to say: 'I look upon the whole world, and all that is in it, as the work of God; and I am not in a position to criticise any of the works of God.' If one may not criticise the character of a friend whom one esteems and loves, surely, *a fortiori*, we ought not to criticise anything in the world at all. The whole of ethics, the whole of religion, is nothing else than bringing our critical faculties to bear upon actions and qualities; and it seems to me that if our critical faculty means anything at all, we are bound to apply it to all the phenomena we see about us." My companion said disdainfully that I was indulging in the merest sophistry, and that he thought that we had better go to bed, which we presently did.

I have, since this conversation, been reflecting about the whole subject, and I am not inclined to admit that my companion was right. In the first place, if every one were to follow the principle that one had no business to criticise one's friends, it would end in being deplorably dull. Imagine the appalling ponderosity of a conversation in which one felt bound to praise every one who was mentioned. Think of the insensate chorus which would arise. "How tall and stately A—— is! How sturdy and compact B—— is! Then there is dear C——; how wise, judicious, prudent, and sensible! And the excellent D——, what candour, what impulsiveness! E——, how worthy, how business-like! Yes, how true that is! How thankful we should be for the examples of A——, B——, C——, D——, and E——!" A very little of such conversation would go a long way. How it would refresh and invigorate the mind! What a field for humour and subtlety it would open up!

It may be urged that we ought not to regulate our conduct upon the basis of trying to avoid what is dull; but I am myself of opinion that dulness is responsible for a large amount of human error and misery. Readers of *The Pilgrim's Progress* will no doubt remember the young woman whose name was Dull, and her choice of

companions—Simple, Sloth, Presumption, Short-mind, Slow-pace, No-heart, Linger-after-lust, and Sleepy-head. These are the natural associates of Madam Dull. The danger of dulness, whether natural or acquired, is the danger of complacently lingering among stupid and conventional ideas, and losing all the bright interchange of the larger world. The dull people are not, as a rule, the simple people—they are generally provided with a narrow and self-sufficient code; they are often entirely self-satisfied, and apt to disapprove of everything that is lively, romantic, and vigorous. Simplicity, as a rule, is either a natural gift, or else can be attained only by people of strong critical powers, who will, firmly and vigorously, test, examine, and weigh motives, and arrive through experience at a direct and natural method of dealing with men and circumstances. True simplicity is not an inherited poverty of spirit; it is rather like the poverty of one who has deliberately discarded what is hampering, vexatious, and unnecessary, and has learnt that the art of life consists in disentangling the spirit from all conventional claims, in living by trained impulse and fine instinct, rather than by tradition and authority. I do not say that the dull people are not probably, in a way, the happier people; I suppose that anything that leads to self-satisfaction is, in a sense, a cause of happiness; but it is

not a species of happiness that people ought to pursue.

Perhaps one ought not to use the word "dulness," because it may be misunderstood. The kind of dulness of which I speak is not inconsistent with a high degree, not only of practical, but even of mental, ability. I know several people of very great intellectual power who are models of dulness. Their memories are loaded with what is no doubt very valuable information, and their conclusions are of the weightiest character; but they have no vivid perception, no alertness, they are not open to new ideas, they never say an interesting or a suggestive thing; their presence is a load on the spirits of a lively party, their very facial expression is a rebuke to all light-mindedness and triviality. Sometimes these people are silent, and then to be in their presence is like being in a thick mist; there is no outlook, no enlivening prospect. Sometimes they are talkers; and I am not sure that that is not even worse, because they generally discourse on their own subjects with profound and serious conviction. They have no power of conversation, because they are not interested in any one else's point of view; they care no more who their companions are, than a pump cares what sort of a vessel is put under it—they only demand that people should listen in silence. I remember

not long ago meeting one of the species, in this case an antiquarian. He discoursed continuously, with a hard eye, fixed as a rule upon the table, about the antiquities of the neighbourhood. I was on one side of him, and was far too much crushed to attempt resistance. I ate and drank mechanically; I said "Yes" and "Very interesting" at intervals; and the only ray of hope upon the horizon was that the hands of the clock upon the mantelpiece did undoubtedly move, though they moved with leaden slowness. On the other side of the *savant* was a lively talker, Matthews by name, who grew very restive under the process. The great man had selected Dorchester as his theme, because he had unhappily discovered that I had recently visited it. My friend Matthews, who had been included in the audience, made desperate attempts to escape; and once, seeing that I was fairly grappled, began a conversation with his next neighbour. But the antiquary was not to be put off. He stopped, and looked at Matthews with a relentless eye. "Matthews," he said, "MATTHEWS!" raising his voice. Matthews looked round. "I was saying that Dorchester was a very interesting place." Matthews made no further attempt to escape, and resigned himself to his fate.

Such men as the antiquary are certainly very

happy people; they are absorbed in their subject, and consider it to be of immense importance. I suppose that their lives are, in a sense, well spent, and that the world is in a way the gainer by their labours. My friend the antiquary has certainly, according to his own account, proved that certain ancient earthworks near Dorchester are of a date at least five hundred years anterior to the received date. It took him a year or two to find out, and I suppose that the human race has benefited in some way or other by the conclusion; but, on the other hand, the antiquary seems to miss all the best things of life. If life is an educative process, people who have lived and loved, who have smiled and suffered, who have perceived beautiful things, who have felt the rapturous and bewildering mysteries of the world—well, they have learnt something of the mind of God, and, when they close their eyes upon the world, take with them an alert, a hopeful, an inquisitive, an ardent spirit, into whatever may be the next act of the drama; but my friend the antiquary, when he crosses the threshold of the unseen, when he is questioned as to what has been his relation to life, will have seen and perceived, and learnt nothing, except the date of the Dorchester earthworks, and similar monuments of history.

And of all the shifting pageant of life, by far the most interesting and exquisite part is our relations with the other souls who are bound on the same pilgrimage. One desires ardently to know what other people feel about it all—what their points of view are, what their motives are, what are the data on which they form their opinions—so that to cut off the discussion of other personalities, on ethical grounds, is like any other stiff and Puritanical attempt to limit interests, to circumscribe experience, to maim life. The criticism, then, or the discussion, of other people is not so much a *cause* of interest in life, as a *sign* of it; it is no more to be suppressed by codes or edicts than any other form of temperamental activity. It is no more necessary to justify the habit, than it is necessary to give good reasons for eating or for breathing; the only thing that it is advisable to do, is to lay down certain rules about it, and prescribe certain methods of practising it. The people who do not desire to discuss others, or who disapprove of doing it, may be pronounced to be, as a rule, either stupid, or egotistical, or Pharisaical; and sometimes they are all three. The only principle to bear in mind is the principle of justice. If a man discusses others spitefully or malevolently, with the sole intention

of either extracting amusement out of their foibles, or with the still more odious intention of emphasising his own virtues by discovering the weakness of others, or with the cynical desire—which is perhaps the lowest of all—of proving the whole business of human life to be a vile and sordid spectacle, then he may be frankly disapproved of, and if possible avoided; but if a man takes a generous view of humanity, if he admires what is large and noble, if he gives full credit for kindliness, strength, usefulness, vigour, sympathy, then his humorous perception of faults and deficiencies, of whims and mannerisms, of prejudices and unreasonablenesses, will have nothing that is hard or bitter about it. For the truth is that, if we are sure that a man is generous and just, his little mannerisms, his fads, his ways, are what mostly endear him to us. The man of lavish liberality is all the more lovable if he has an intense dislike to cutting the string of a parcel, and loves to fill his drawers with little hanks of twine, the untying of which stands for many wasted hours. If we know a man to be simple-minded, forbearing, and conscientious, we like him all the better when he tells for the fiftieth time an ancient story, prefacing it by anxious inquiries, which are smilingly rebutted, as to whether any

of his hearers have ever heard the anecdote before.

But we must not let this tendency, to take a man in his entirety, to love him as he is, carry us too far; we must be careful that the foibles that endear him to us are in themselves innocent.

There is one particular form of priggishness, in this matter of criticism of others, which is apt to beset literary people, and more especially at a time when it seems to be considered by many writers that the first duty of a critic—they would probably call him an artist for the sake of the associations—is to get rid of all sense of right and wrong. I was reading the other day a sensible and appreciative review of Mr. Lucas's new biography of Charles Lamb. The reviewer quoted with cordial praise Mr. Lucas's remark—referring, of course, to the gin-and-water, which casts, I fear, in my own narrow view, something of a sordid shadow over Lamb's otherwise innocent life—"A man must be very secure in his own righteousness who would pass condemnatory judgment upon Charles Lamb's only weakness." I do not myself think this a sound criticism. We ought not to abstain from condemning the weakness, we must abstain from condemning Charles Lamb. His beautiful virtues, his tenderness, his extraordinary sweet-

ness and purity of nature, far outweigh this weakness. But what are we to do? Are we to ignore, to condone, to praise the habit? Are we to think the better of Charles Lamb and love him more because he tippled? Would he not have been more lovable without it?

And the fact that one may be conscious of similar faults and moral weaknesses, ought not to make one more, but less, indulgent to such a fault when we see it in a beautiful nature. The fault in question is no more in itself adorable, than it is in another man who does not possess Lamb's genius.

We have a perfect right—nay, we do well—to condemn in others faults which we frankly condemn in ourselves. It does not help on the world if we go about everywhere slobbering with forgiveness and affection; it is the most mawkish sentimentality to love people in such a way that we condone grave faults in them; and to condone a fault because a man is great, when we condemn it if he is not great, is only a species of snobbishness. It is right to compassionate sinners, to find excuse for the faults of every one but ourselves; but we ought not to love so foolishly and irrationally, that we cannot even bring ourselves to wish our hero's faults away.

I confess to feeling the most minute and detailed interest in the smallest matters connected with other people's lives and idiosyncrasies. I cannot bear biographies of the dignified order, which do not condescend to give what are called personal details, but confine themselves to matters of undoubted importance. When I have finished reading such books I feel as if I had been reading *The Statesman's Year-book*, or *The Annual Register*. I have no mental picture of the hero; he is merely like one of those bronze statues, in frock-coat and trousers, that decorate our London squares.

I was reading, the other day, an ecclesiastical biography. The subject of it, a high dignitary of the Church, had attended the funeral of one of his episcopal colleagues, with whom he had had several technical controversies. On the evening of the day he wrote a very tender and beautiful account of the funeral in his diary, which is quoted at length: "How little," he wrote, "the sense of difference, and how strong my feeling of his power and solid sense; how little I care that he was wrong about the Discipline Bill, how much that he was so happy with us in the summer; how much that he was, as all the family told me, so 'devoted' to my Nellie!"

That is a thoroughly human statement, and preserves a due sense of proportion. In the presence of death it is the kindly human relations that matter more than policies and statesmanship.

And so it may be said, in conclusion, that we cannot taste the fulness of life, unless we can honestly say, *Nihil humani a me alienum puto.* If we grow absorbed in work, in business, in literature, in art, in policy, to the exclusion of the nearer human elements, we dock and maim our lives. We cannot solve the mystery of this difficult world; but we may be sure of this —that it is not for nothing that we are set in the midst of interests and relationships, of liking and loving, of tenderness and mirth, of sorrow and pain. If we are to get the most and the best out of life, we must not seclude ourselves from these things; and one of the nearest and simplest of duties is the perception of others' points of view, of sympathy, in no limited sense; and that sympathy we can only gain through looking at humanity in its wholeness. If we allow ourselves to be blinded by false conscience, by tradition, by stupidity, even by affection, from realising what others are, we suffer, as we always suffer from any wilful blindness; indeed, wilful blindness is the most desperate of all faults,

perhaps the only one that can hardly be condoned, because it argues a confidence in one's own opinion, a self-sufficiency, a self-estimation, which shut out, as by an opaque and sordid screen, the light of heaven from the soul.

XII

PRIESTS

I HAVE been fortunate in the course of my life in knowing, more or less intimately, several eminent priests; and by this I do not mean necessarily eminent ecclesiastics; several famous ecclesiastics with whom circumstances have brought me into contact have not been priestly persons at all; they have been vigorous, wise, energetic, statesmanlike men, such as I suppose the Pontifex Maximus at Rome might have been, with a kind of formal, almost hereditary, priesthood. And, on the other hand, I have known more than one layman of distinctly priestly character, priestly after the order of Melchisedec, who had not, I suppose, received any religious consecration for his ministry, apart from perhaps a kingly initiation.

The essence of the priest is that he should believe himself, however humbly and secretly, to be set in a certain sense between humanity and God. He is conscious, if not of a mission,

at least of a vocation, as an interpreter of secrets, a guardian of mysteries; he would believe that there are certain people in the world who are called to be apostles, whose work it is to remind men of God, and to justify the ways of God to men. He feels that he stands, like Aaron, to make atonement; that he is in a certain definite relation to God, a relation which all do not share; and that this gives him, in a special sense, something of the divine and fatherly relation to men. In the hands of a perfectly humble, perfectly disinterested man, this may become a very beautiful and tender thing. Such a man, from long and intimate relations with humanity, will have a very deep knowledge of the human heart. He will be surprised at no weakness or frailty; he will be patient with all perverseness and obduracy; he will be endlessly compassionate, because he will realise the strength and insistence of temptation; he will be endlessly hopeful, because he will have seen, a hundred times over, the flower of virtue and love blooming in an arid and desolate heart. He will have seen close at hand the transforming power of faith, even in natures which have become the shuddering victims of evil habit.

Such a priest as I describe had occasion once to interview a great doctor about the terrible

case of a woman of high social position who had become the slave of drink. The doctor was a man of great force and ability, and of unwearying devotion; but he was what would be called a sceptic and a materialist. The priest asked if the case was hopeless; the great doctor shrugged his shoulders. "Yes," he said, "pathologically speaking, it is hopeless; there may be periods of recovery, but the course that the case will normally run will be a series of relapses, each more serious and of longer duration than the last." "Is there no chance of recovery on any line that you could suggest?" said the priest. The two looked at each other, both good men and true. "Well," said the doctor after a pause, "this is more in your line than mine; the only possible chance lies in the will, and that can only be touched through an emotion. I have seen a religious emotion successful, where everything else failed." The priest smiled and said, "I suppose that would seem to you a species of delusion? You would not admit that there was any reality behind it?" "Yes," said the doctor, "a certain reality, no doubt; the emotional processes are at present somewhat obscure from the scientific point of view: it is a forlorn hope." "Yes," said the priest, "and it is thus the kind of task for

which I and those of my calling feel bound to volunteer."

Of course one of the difficulties that the priest has to struggle against is his inheritance. If we trace back the vocation of the priest to the earliest times, we find their progenitors connected with some of the darkest and saddest things in human history. They are of the same tribe as wizards and magicians, sorcerers and medicine-men, the celebrators of cruel and unholy rites. The priests of Moloch, of Chemosh, of Baal, are the dark and ancient ancestors of the same vocation. All who have trafficked in the terrors of mankind, who have gained power by trading on superstitious imaginings, who have professed to propitiate wrathful and malignant spirits, to stand between men and their dreadful Maker—all these have contributed their share to the dark and sad burden which the priest has to bear. As soon as man, rising out of pure savagery, began to have any conception of the laws of nature, he found in himself a deep instinct for happiness, a terror of suffering and death; yet, at the same time, he found himself set in a world where afflictions seemed to be rained down upon humanity by some mysterious, unseen, and awful power. Could man believe that God wished him well, who

racked him with cruel pain, sent plagues among his cattle, swept away those whom he loved, destroyed his crops with hail and thunderbolts, and at the end of all dragged him reluctant and shuddering into the darkness, out of a world where so much was kind and cheerful, and where, after all, it was sweet to live?

He turned in his despair to any one who could profess to hold out any shield over him, who could claim to read the dreadful mind of God, and to propitiate His mercy. Even then a demand created a supply. Men have always loved power and influence; and so spirits of sterner and more tenacious mould, who could perhaps despise the lesser terrors of mankind, and who desired, above all things, to hold the destinies of others in their hands, to make themselves felt, naturally seized the opportunity of surrounding themselves with the awe and dignity that the supposed possession of deeper knowledge and more recondite powers offered them. Then as the world broadened and widened, as reason began to extend its sway, the work of the priest became more beneficent, and tended to bless and hallow rather than to blast and curse. But still the temptation remains a terribly strong one for men of a certain type, men who can afford to despise the more material

successes of the world, who can merge their personal ambition in ambitions for an order and a caste, still to claim to stand between man and God, to profess to withhold His blessings, to grasp the keys of His mysteries, to save men from the consequences of sin. As long as human terror exists, as long as men fear suffering and darkness and death, they will turn to any one who can profess to give them relief; and relief, too, will come; for the essence of courage is, for many timid hearts, the dependence upon a stronger will. And if a man can say, with a tranquil conviction, to a suffering and terrified comrade, "There is no need to fear," the fear loses half its terrors and half its sting.

Now, when religion of any kind becomes a part of the definite social life of the world, there must of course be an order of ministers whose business it is to preach it, and to bring it home to the minds of men. Such men will be set apart by a solemn initiation to their office; the more solemn the initiation is, the more faithful they will be. The question rather is what extent of spiritual power such ministers may claim. The essence of religious liberty is that men should feel that there is nothing whatever that stands between themselves and God; that they can approach God with perfect and simple access;

that they can speak to Him without concealment of their sins, and receive from Him the comforting sense of the possibility of forgiveness. Of course the sense of sin is a terribly complicated one, because it seems to be made up partly of an inner sense of transgression, a sense of failure, a consciousness that we have acted unworthily, meanly, miserably. Yet the sense of sin follows many acts that are not in themselves necessarily disastrous either to oneself or the community. Then there is a further sense of sin, perhaps developed by long inheritance of instinct, which seems to attend acts not in themselves sinful, but which menace the security of society. For instance, there is nothing sinful in a man's desiring to save himself, and in fact saving himself, from a sudden danger. If a man leaps out of the way of a runaway cart, or throws himself on the ground to avoid the accidental discharge of a gun, he would never be blamed, nor would he blame himself, for any want of courage. Yet if a man in a battle saves himself from death by flight, he would regard himself, and be regarded by others, as having failed in his duty, and he would be apt to feel a lifelong shame and remorse for having yielded to the impulse. Again, the deliberate killing of another human being in a fit of anger, however just, would be

regarded by the offender as a deeply sinful act, and he would not quarrel with the justice of the sentence of death which would be meted out to him; but when we transfer the same act to the region of war, which is consecrated by the usage of society, a man who had slain a hundred enemies would regard the fact with a certain complacency, and would not be even encouraged by a minister of religion to repent of his hundred heinous crimes upon his deathbed.

The sense, then, of sin is in a certain degree an artificial sense, and would seem to consist partly of a deep and divine instinct which arraigns the soul for acts, which may be in themselves trifling, but which seem to possess the sinful quality; and partly of a conventional instinct which considers certain things to be abominable, which are not necessarily in themselves sinful, because it is the custom of the world to consider them so.

And then to the philosopher there falls a darker tinge upon the whole matter, when he considers that the evil impulses, to yield to which is sin, are in themselves deliberately implanted in man by his Creator, or at least not apparently eradicated; and that many of those whose whole life has been darkened, embittered, and wrecked by sin, have incurred their misery by yielding to

tendencies which in themselves are, by inheritance, practically irresistible.

What room is there, then, in these latter days, when reason and science together have dispelled the darkness of superstition, have diminished the possibility of miraculous occurrences, have laughed empirical occultism out of the field, for the priest?

There is no room for him if there lingers in the depth of his mind any taint of the temptation to serve his own ends, or to exalt himself or his order, by trading on the fears of irrational and credulous humanity. Against such priestcraft as this the true priest must array himself, together with the scientist, the statesman, the physician. Against all personal and priestly domination all lovers of liberty and God must combine. Theirs is the sin of Simon Magus, the sin of Hophni, the sin of Caiaphas; the sin that desires that men should still be bound, in order that they may themselves win worship and honour. It is the deadliest and vilest tyranny in the world.

But of the true priesthood there is more need than there ever was, as the minds of men awaken to the truth; for in a world where there is so much that is dark, men need to be constantly encouraged, reminded, even rebuked. The true priest must leave the social conscience alone, and entrust it to the hands of statesmen and officials.

His concern must be with the individual; he must endeavour to make men realise that tranquillity and security of heart can only be won by victories over self, that law is only a cumbrous and incomplete organisation for enforcing upon men a sense of equality; and he must show how far law lags behind morality, and that a man may be legally respectable yet morally abominable. The true priest must not obscure the oracles of God; he must beware of teaching that faith is an intricate intellectual process. He must pare religion to the bone, and show that the essence of it is a perfectly simple relation with God and neighbour. He must not concern himself with policy or ceremony; he must warn men against mistaking æsthetic impulse for the perception of virtue; he must fight against precedent and tradition and custom; he must realise that one point of union is more important than a hundred points of difference. He must set himself against upholsteries and uniforms, against formalities and rituals. He must abjure wealth and position, in favour of humble kindliness and serviceableness. He must have a sense of poetry and romance and beauty about life; where other men are artists in words, in musical tones, in pigments or sculptured stone, he must be an artist in virtue. He must be the friend and

lover of humble, inefficient, inarticulate, unpleasing persons; and he must be able to show that there is a desirable quality of beauty in the most sordid and commonplace action, if faithfully performed.

Against such an ideal are arrayed all the forces of the world. Christ and Christ-like men have held up such an ideal to humanity; and the sorrow of it is that, the moment that such thoughts have won for themselves the incredible and instant power that they do win among mortals, men of impure motive, who have desired the power more than the service, have seized upon the source, have fenced it off, have systematised its distribution, have enriched themselves by withholding and denying it to all but those who can pay a price, if not of wealth, at all events of submission and obedience and recognition.

A man who desires the true priesthood may perhaps find it readiest to his hand in some ecclesiastical organisation; yet there he is surrounded by danger; his impulses are repressed; he must sacrifice them for the sake of the caste to which he belongs; he is told to be cautious and prudent; he is praised and rewarded for being conventional. But a man may also take such a consecration for himself, as a king takes

a crown from the altar and crowns himself with might; he need not require it at the hands of another. If a man resolves not to live for himself or his own ambitions, but to walk up and down in the earth, praising simplicity and virtue and the love of God wherever he sees it, protesting against tyranny and selfishness, bearing others' burdens as far as he can, he may exercise the priesthood of God. Such men are to be found in every Church, and even holding the highest places in them; but such a priesthood is found, though perhaps few suspect it, by thousands among women where it is found by tens among men. Perhaps it may be said that if a man adds the tenderness of a woman to the serene strength of a man, he is best fitted for the task; but the truth lies in the fact that the qualities for the exercise of such an influence are to be found far more commonly among women than among men, though accompanied as a rule by less consciousness of it, and little desire to exercise it officially; indeed it is the very absence of egotism among women, the absence of the personal claim, that makes them less effective than they otherwise might be, because they do not hold an object or an aim dear enough. They desire to achieve, rather than to be known to have achieved; and yet

in this unperceptive world, human beings are apt to choose for their guides and counsellors people whom they know by reputation, rather than those whom they know familiarly. And thus mere recognition often brings with it a power of wider influence, because people are apt to trust the judgment of others rather than their own. In seeking for an adviser, men are apt to consider who has the greatest reputation for wisdom, rather than whom they themselves have found wisest; and thus the man who seeks for influence often attains it, because he has a wider circle of those who recommend him. It is this absence of independent judgment that gives strength to the self-seeking priest; while the natural priesthood of women is less recognised because it is attended with no advertisement.

The natural priest is one whom one can instinctively and utterly trust, in whom one can deposit secrets as one deposits them in the custody of a bank, without any fear that they will be used for other purposes. In the true priest one finds a tender compassion, a deep and patient love; it is not worth while to wear disguises before him, because his keen, weary, and amused eye sees through the mask. It is not worth while to keep back, as Ananias did, part of the price of

the land, to leave sordid temptations untold, because the true priest loves the sinner even more than he hates the sin; it is best to be utterly sincere with him, because he loves sincerity even more than unstained virtue; and one can confess to him one's desires for good with as little false shame as one can confess one's hankering after evil. Perhaps in one respect the man is more fitted to be a confessor than a woman, because he has a deeper experience of the ardour and the pleasure of temptation; and yet the deeper tenderness of the woman gives her a sympathy for the tempted, which is not even communicated by a wider experience of sin.

Perhaps there is nothing that reflects our anthropomorphic ideas of God more strongly than the fact that no revelation of prophets has ever conceived of the Supreme Deity as other than masculine; and no doubt the Mariolatry of the Church of Rome is the reflection of the growing influence in the world of the feminine element; and yet the conception of God as masculine is in itself a limitation of His infinite perfection. That we should carry our conception of sex into the infinite is perhaps a mere failure of imagination, and if we could divest ourselves of a thought which possibly has no reality in it, we should perhaps grow to feel that the true

priesthood of life could be exercised as well by women as by men, or even better. The true principle is that all those who are set free by a natural grace, a divine instinct, from grosser temptations, and whose freedom leads them not to a cold self-sufficiency, to a contempt for what is weaker, but to an ardent desire to save, to renew, to upraise, are the natural priests or priestesses of the world; for the only way in which the priest can stand between man and God is, when smaller and more hampered natures realise that he has a divine freedom and compassion conferred upon him, which sets him above themselves; when they can feel that in religion it is better to agree with the saints than to differ from them; when they can see that there are certain people whose religious intuitions can be trusted, because they are wider and deeper than the narrower intuitions of more elementary natures.

The priest, then, that I would recognise is not the celebrater of lonely and forlorn mysteries, the proprietor of divine blessings, the posturer in solemn ceremonies, but the man or woman of candid gaze, of fearless heart, of deep compassion, of infinite concern. It is these qualities which, if they are there, lend to rite and solemnity a holiness and a significance which they cannot

win from antiquity or tradition. Such priests as these are the interpreters of the Divine will, the channels of Divine grace; and the hope of the race lies in the fact that such men and women are sent into the world, and go in and out among us, more than in all the stately organisations, the mysterious secrets, the splendid shrines, devised by the art of man to make fences about the healing spring; shrines where, though sound and colour may lavish their rich hues, their moving tones, yet the raiment of the priest may hide a proud and greedy heart, and the very altar may be cold.

XIII

AMBITION

I AM afraid that Milton's great line about ambition,

"That last infirmity of noble minds,"

is responsible for a good deal of harm, because it induces high-minded persons of inexact ideas to think ambition a noble infirmity, or at least to believe that they need not try to get rid of their personal ambitions until they have conquered all their other evil dispositions. I suppose that what Milton meant was that it was the hardest of all faults to get rid of; and the reason why it is so difficult to eject it, is because it is so subtle and ingenious a spirit, and masquerades under such splendid disguises, arrayed in robes of light. A man who desires to fill a high position in the world is so apt to disguise his craving to himself by thinking, or trying to think, that he desires a great place because of the beneficent influence he can exert, and all the good that he will be able to do, which shall stream from him as light

from the sun. Of course to a high-minded man that is naturally one of the honest pleasures of an important post; but he ought to be quite sure that his motive is that the good should be done, and not that he should have the credit of doing it. I have burnt my own fingers not once nor twice at the fire of ambition, and the subject has been often in my mind. But my experiences were so wholly unlike anything that I had anticipated, though I suppose they are in reality normal enough, that I will venture to set them down here. The first curious experience was how, on a nearer survey of the prospect of obtaining an important post, all the incidental advantages and conveniences of the position sank into nothingness. This was a quite unexpected development; I had imagined that a prospect of dignity and importance would have had something vaguely sustaining about it. A brilliant satirist once said that a curate did not as a rule desire to be a bishop that he might exercise a wide and useful influence, but primarily that he might be called "my lord." I myself was brought, as a child, in contact with one who was somewhat unexpectedly called to a high office. I was much with him in the days when his honours first invested him, and I confess with a certain shame that it did undoubtedly seem to me that the

dignity of the office, the sense of power, the obvious respect paid to him by people of position, were things that must pleasantly sweeten a mortal cup. The other day I was in the company of an eminent prelate; there were three curates present; they hovered round the great man like bees round a flower; they gazed with innocent rapture upon his shapely legs, somewhat strangely swathed, as Carlyle said, his bright, grotesque hat; and I could not help feeling that they thought how well such raiment would become themselves. It is of course a childish view; but then how long our childish views survive, though hidden under grave pretences! To see a great personage move with dignity to his appointed place in a great ceremony, attended by all the circumstances of pomp, a congregation gazing, with an organ above thundering out rich and solemn music, how impressive it all appears! How hard to think that the central actor in such a scene does not feel his heart swell with a complacent joy! And yet I suppose that any sensible man under such conditions is far more likely to be oppressed with a sense of weakness and anxious responsibility; how soon such surroundings ought to, nay, do find their true value in a wise man's mind! The triumph rather is if, in the midst of all this glitter and glory, when a silence is made, the worshipful

man speaks simple and strong words out of a pure and noble heart; and then one can feel that the pomp is nothing but the due homage of mankind for real greatness, and that it has followed him rather than been followed by him.

It was a relief to find, as I say, that, on a nearer prospect, all the circumstance of greatness vanished into shadow—indeed more than that—it became one of the distinct disadvantages of the position. I felt that time and money and thought would have to be spent on the useless and fatiguing *mise-en-scène*, and that it would all entail a quantity of futile worry, of tiresome publicity, of intolerable functions, that meant nothing but weariness of spirit. I think that men of high official position are most to be pitied because of the time that they have to spend, not in their work, but in the ornamental appearances entailed on them by their duties. These things have a certain value, I suppose, in stimulating the imagination of gazers; but surely it is a poor value after all. A secretary of state in his study, working out the hard and tiresome details of a plan that will benefit perhaps a whole nation in humble ways, is a more admirable figure than the same man, in ribbon and star, bowing and smiling at an evening party. And yet the dignified trappings of the post are what ordinary men desire.

The next step in my own progress when confronted, as I say, with the prospect of the possibility that I might feel bound to accept an important position, was the consciousness of the anxious and wearing responsibilities that it involved. I felt that a millstone was to be bound round my neck, and that I must bid farewell to what is after all the best gift of heaven, my liberty; a liberty won by anxious years of hard toil.

And here I have no doubt, though I tried hard not to let it affect me, that my desire not to sacrifice my liberty did make me exaggerate the difficulties that lay before me; difficulties which I should probably have unconsciously minimised if I had desired the position which was in prospect. It was a happy moment when I found myself relieved from the responsibility of undertaking an impossible task. I felt, too, that I was further disqualified by my reluctance to attempt the task; a reluctance which a near prospect of the position had poignantly revealed to me. A great task ought to be taken up with a certain buoyancy and eagerness of spirit, not in heaviness and sadness. A certain tremor of nerves, a stage fright, is natural to all sensitive performers. But this is merely a kind of anteroom through which one must needs pass to a

part which one desires to play; but if one does not sincerely desire to play the part, it is clear that to attempt it merely from a sense of duty is an ill omen for success. And so I felt sincerely and humbly that I ought not to feel compelled to attempt it. The conviction came in a flash like a divine intuition, and was followed by a peace of mind which showed me that I was acting rightly. I seemed too to perceive that the best work in the world was not the work of administration and organisation, but humble and individual ministries performed in a corner without tangible rewards. For such work I was both equipped and prepared, and I turned back to the *fallentis semita vitæ*, which is the true path for the sincere spirit, aware that I had been truly and tenderly saved from committing a grave mistake.

Perhaps if one could have looked at the whole question in a simpler and larger-minded way, the result might have been different. But here temperament comes in, and the very complexities and intricacies that clouded the matter were of themselves evidence that after all it was the temperament that was at fault. Cecil Rhodes, it is recorded, once asked Lord Acton why Mr. Bent, the explorer, did not pronounce certain ruins to be of Phœnician origin. Lord Acton

replied with a smile that it was probably because he was not sure. "Ah!" said Cecil Rhodes, "that is not the way that Empires are made." A true, interesting, and characteristic comment; but it also contains a lesson that people who are not sure should not attempt to make empires, or undertake tasks that involve the welfare of many.

And so there remains the duty to me, after my piece of experience, to gather up the fragments that remain, to interpret. Dante assigns the lowest place in the lower world to those who refuse a great opportunity, but he is speaking of those who perversely reject a great task, which is plainly in their power, for some false and low motive. But the case is different for those who have a great temptation put before them, and who, desiring to do what is right, have it brought home to them in a convincing way that it is not their opportunity. No one ought to assume great responsibilities if he is not equal to them. One of the saddest things ever said on a human deathbed was what was said by a great ecclesiastic, who had disappointed the hopes that had been formed of him. In his last moments he turned to one who stood near him and murmured, "I have held a great post, and I have not been equal to it." The misery

was that no one could sincerely contradict him. It is not a piece of noble self-sacrifice to have assumed confidently a great responsibility to which one is not equal. It is a mere mistake, and a mistake which is even more reprehensible than the mistake of being over-persuaded into attempting a task for which one is not fitted. One is given reason and common sense and prudence that one may use them, and to act contrary to their dictates because those who do not know you so well as you know yourself advise you cheerfully that it will probably be all right, is an act of criminal folly. Heavy responsibilities are lightly assumed nowadays, because the temptations of power and publicity are very strong, and because too high a value is set upon worldly success. It is a plainer and simpler duty for those who wish to act rightly, and who have formed a deliberate idea of their own limitations, to refuse great positions humbly and seriously, if they know that they will be unequal to them.

Of course I knew that I should be reproached with indolence and even cowardice. I knew that I should be supposed to be one of those consistently impracticable people who insist on going off at a tangent when the straight course lies before them. That I should be relegated to the

class of persons who have failed in life through some deep-seated defect of will. The worst of a serious decision of the kind is that, whichever step one takes, one is sure to be blamed. I saw all this with painful clearness, but it is better to be arraigned before the tribunal of other men's consciences than to be condemned before one's own. It is better to refuse and be disappointed, than to accept and be disappointed. Failure in the course marked out, in the event of acceptance, would have been disastrous, not only to myself but to the institution I was to be set to rule and guide. Far better that the task should be entrusted to one who had no diffidence, no hesitation, but a sincere confidence in his power of dealing with the difficulties of the situation, and an ardent desire to grapple with them.

The only difficulty, if one believes very strongly, as I do, in a great and wise Providence that guides out path, is to interpret why the possibility of a great task is indicated to one if it is not intended that one should perform it. But the essence of a true belief in the call of Providence seems to me to lie not in the rash acceptance of any invitation that happens to come in one's way, but a stern and austere judgment of one's own faculties and powers. I have not the smallest

doubt that Providence intended that this great task should be refused by me; my only difficulty is to see what to make of it, and why it was even suggested. One lesson is that one must beware of personal vanity, another that one should not indulge in the temptation to desire important posts for any reason except the best; the humble hope to do work that is useful and valuable. If I had sternly repressed these tendencies at an earlier stage of life, this temptation would not have been necessary, nor the humiliation which inevitably succeeds it.

But

> He that is down need fear no fall,
> He that is low no pride.

And there can be now no more chance of these bitter and self-revealing incidents, which show one, as in a clear mirror, the secret weaknesses of the heart.

But in setting aside the desire for the crowns and thrones of ambition, we must be very careful that we are not merely yielding to temptations of indolence, of fastidiousness, of cowardice, and calling a personal motive unworldliness for the sake of the associations. No man need set himself to seek great positions, but a man who is diffident, and possibly indolent, will do well to pin himself down in a position of responsibility

and influence, if it comes naturally in his way. There are a good many men with high natural gifts of an instinctive kind who are yet averse to using them diligently, who, indeed, from the very facility with which they exercise them, hardly know their value. Such men as these—and I have known several—undertake a great responsibility if they refuse to take advantage of obvious opportunities to use their gifts. Men of this kind have often a certain vague, poetical, and dreamy quality of mind; a contemplative gift. They see and exaggerate the difficulties and perils of posts of high responsibility. If they yield to temptations of temperament, they often become ineffective, dilettante, half-hearted natures, playing with life and speculating over it, instead of setting to work on a corner of the tangle. They hang spiritless upon the verge of the battle instead of mingling with the fray. The curse of such temperaments is that they seem destined to be unhappy whichever way they decide. If they accept positions of responsibility, they are fretted and strained by difficulties and obstacles; they live uneasily and anxiously; they lose the buoyancy with which great work should be done; if, on the other hand, they refuse to come forward, they are tortured with regrets for having abstained; they become conscious of ineffectiveness and indecision;

they are haunted by the spectres of what might have been.

The only course for such natures is to endeavour to see where their true life lies, and to follow the dictates of reason and conscience as far as possible. They must resolve not to be tempted by the glamour of possible success, but to take the true measure of their powers. They must not yield to the temptation to trust to the flattering judgment that others may form of their capacities, nor light-heartedly to shoulder a burden which they may be able to lift but not to carry. Such natures will sometimes attempt a great task with a certain glow and enthusiasm; but they must ask themselves humbly how they will continue to discharge it when the novelty has worn off, and when the prospect that lies before them is one of patient and unpraised labour. It leads to worse disasters to over-estimate one's powers than to under-estimate them. A man who over-estimates his capacities is apt to grow impatient, and even tyrannical, in the presence of difficulties.

And after all it may be said that humility is a rarer virtue than confidence; and though it is not so popular, though it does not appeal so much to the imagination, it is a quality that may well be exercised, if it is done without self-consciousness,

in these busy days and in these active western climes. The best work of the world is done, as I have said, not by those who organise on a large scale, but by those who work faithfully on individual lines, in corners and byways. Indeed, the success of those who organise and rule is due in part no doubt to the power that they may possess of inspiring silent effort, but is still more largely due to the faithful workers whose labours are unnoted, who carry out great designs in a simple and quiet spirit. There is strong warrant in the teaching of Christ for the work of those who are faithful in a few things. There is no warrant for the action of those who stride into the front, and clamour to be entrusted with the destinies of others. There can be no question that Christ does not admit the value of ambition in any form as a motive for character. The lives that He praises are the lives of quiet, affectionate persons, more concerned with the things of the spirit than with the things of the intellect. The Christian must concern himself, not with grasping at influence, not even with setting his mark upon the world, but with the quality of his decisions, his work, his words, his thoughts. The only thing possible for him is to go forward step by step, trusting more to the guidance of God than to his own designs, to what are called

intuitions more than to reasoned conclusions. In that spirit, if he can attain to it, he begins to be able to estimate things at their true value. Instead of being dazzled with the bright glare which the world throws upon the objects of his desire, he sees all things in a pale, clear light of dawn, and true aims begin to glow with an inner radiance. He may tremble and hesitate before a decision, but once taken there is no looking back; he knows that he has been guided, and that God has told him, by silent and eloquent motions of the spirit, what it is that He would have him to do; he has but to interpret and to trust.

But even supposing that one has learnt one's own lesson in the school of ambition, the question comes in as to how far it should be used as a motive for the young, by those who are entrusted with educational responsibilities. It is one of the most difficult things to decide as to what extent it is permissible to use motives that are lower than the highest, because they may possess a greater effectiveness in the case of immature minds. It is easy enough to say sincerely that one ought always to appeal to the highest possible motive; but when one is conscious that the highest motive is quite out of the horizon of the person concerned, and practically is no motive at all, is it not merely pedantry to insist upon appealing to

the highest motive for one's own satisfaction? It is not perhaps so difficult where the lower reason for a course of action is still a sound reason in itself, as, for instance, if one is trying to help a man out of drunken habits. The highest motive to appeal to is the truth that in yielding to sensual impulses, in such a matter, a man is falling short of his best ideal; but a more practical motive is to point out the loss of health and respectability that results from the practice. Yet when one appeals to a boy's ambition, and encourages him to be ambitious, one cannot be quite certain whether one is not appealing to a false motive altogether. The excuse for using it is the hope that, when for the sake of ambition he has learnt diligence and perseverance, he may grow to perceive that the competitive instinct, which in its barest form is the desire to obtain desirable things at the expense of others, is not in reality a good motive at all. With immature characters part of the joy of success is that others have been beaten, the pride of having carried off a prize which others are disappointed of obtaining. And if one talks to an ambitious boy, and tries to inculcate the principle that one should do one's best without caring about results, one is generally conscious that he believes it to be only a tiresome professional platitude, the kind of sentiment in which older

people think fit to indulge for the purpose, if possible, of throwing cold water on innocent enjoyment.

Yet, after all, how very few people there are who do learn the further lesson! The successful man generally continues to show to the end of his life a contempt for unsuccessful persons, which is only good-humoured because of the consciousness of his own triumph; how rare, again, it is to find an unsuccessful person who does not attempt, if he can, to belittle the attainments of his successful rival, or who at least, if he overcomes that temptation from a sense of propriety, feels entitled to nourish a secret satisfaction at any indication of failure on the part of the man who has obtained the prize that he himself coveted in vain. Yet if one has ever seen, as I have, the astonishing change of both work and even character which may come over a boy or a young man who is perhaps diffident and indolent, if one can get him to do a successful piece of work, or push an opportunity in his way and help him to sieze it, one hesitates before ruling out the use of ambition as an incentive. Perhaps it is uneasy and casuistical morality to shrink from using this incentive, so long as one faithfully puts the higher side of the question before a boy as well. But when one is quite sure that the larger aspect of

the case will fall on deaf ears, and that only the lower stimulus will be absorbed, one is apt to hesitate. I am inclined, however, to think that such hesitation is on the whole misplaced, and that in dealing with immature minds one must be content to use immature motives. There is a temptation to try and keep the education of people too much in one's own hands, and to feel oneself to be too responsible in the matter. I have a friend who errs in this respect, and who is apt to assume too wide a responsibility in dealing with others, who was gently rebuked by a wise-hearted teacher of wide and deep experience, who said on one occasion, when over-anxiety had spoilt the effect of my friend's attempts, that he ought to be content to leave something for God to do.

But for oneself, one must try to learn the large lesson in the course of time, to learn that the sense of ambition is often, in reality, only a sense of personal vanity and self-confidence disguised; and that the one possible attitude of mind is to go humbly and patiently forward, desiring the best, labouring faithfully and abundantly, neither seeking nor avoiding great opportunities, not failing in courage nor giving way to rash impulses, and realising the truth of the wise old Greek proverb that the greatest of all disasters for a man is to be opened and found to be empty; the wise applica-

tion of which to life is not to avoid the occasions of opening, but to make sure that if the opening comes inevitably, we shall be found not to have devoted ourselves to the adorning of the casket, but to have piled with careful hands the treasure high within.

XIV

THE SIMPLE LIFE

THERE is a good deal of talk just now about "the simple life," and though I would not go so far as to say that there is a movement in the direction of it, yet the talk that one hears on many sides proves, at all events, that people take a certain interest in the question.

Part of it is a pose, no doubt; there is a distinguished, and I would add very charming, lady of my acquaintance, who has the subject constantly on her lips. Her method of practising simplicity is a delightful one, as all her methods are. In addition to the three magnificent residences which she already possesses, she has bought a cottage in a secluded part of the country; she has spent a large sum of money in adding to it; it is furnished with that stately austerity which can only be achieved at great expense. She motors down there, perhaps three times in the year, and spends three days there, on each visit, with two or three friends who are equally in love with simplicity;

I was fortunate enough, the other day, to be included in one of these parties; the only signs of simplicity to the complex mind were that there were only five courses at dinner, that we drank champagne out of rather old-fashioned long glasses, and that two goats were tethered in a corner of the lawn. The goats I understood were the seal and symbol of the simple life. No use was made of them, and they were decidedly in the way, but without them life would have been complicated at once.

When we went off again in the motor, my charming hostess waved her hand at the little cottage, as we turned the corner, with a sigh, as of one condemned by a stern fate to abjure the rural felicity which she loved, and then settled down with delighted zest to discuss her programme of social engagements for the next few weeks.

It had certainly been very delightful; we had talked all day long; we had wandered, adoring simplicity, on the village green; we had attended an evening service in the church; we had consumed exquisitely cooked meals about an hour before the usual time, because to breakfast at eight and to dine at seven was all part of the pretty game. I ventured to ask my hostess how she would like to spend six months in her cottage comparatively alone, and she replied with deep

conviction, " I should adore it ; I would give all I possess to be able to do it." " Then it is nothing," I said, " but a sense of duty that tears you away ? " To which she made no answer except to shake her head mournfully, and to give me a penetrating smile.

I cannot help wondering whether the people who talk about the simple life have any idea what it means ; I do not think that my fair hostess's desire for it is altogether a pose. One who lives, as she does, in the centre of the fashionable world, must inevitably tire of it from time to time. She meets the same people over and over again, she hears the same stories, the same jokes ; she is not exactly an intellectual woman, though she has a taste for books and music ; the interest for her, in the world in which she lives, is the changing relations of people, their affinities, their aversions, their loves and hates, their warmth and their coldness. What underlies the shifting scene, the endless entertainments, the county-house visits, the ebb and flow of society, is really the mystery of sex. People with not very much to do but to amuse themselves, with no prescribed duties, with few intellectual interests, become preoccupied in what is the great underlying force in the world, the passion of love ; the talk that goes on, dull and tiresome as it appears to an outsider, is all charged

with the secret influence; it is not what is said that matters; it is what is implied by manner and glance and inflection of tone. This atmosphere of electrical emotion is, for a good many years of their lives, the native air of these fair and unoccupied women. Men drift into it and out of it, and it provides for them often no more than a beautiful and thrilling episode; they become interested in sport, in agriculture, in politics, in business; but with women it is different; lovers and husbands, emotional friendships with other women—these constitute the business of life for a time; and then perhaps the tranquillising and purer love of children, the troubles and joys of growing boys and girls, come in to fill the mind with a serener and kindlier, though not less passionate an emotion; and so life passes, and age draws near.

It is thus easier for men to lead the simple life than women, because they find it natural to grow absorbed in some definite and tangible occupation; and, after all, the essence of the simple life is that it can be lived in any *milieu* and under any circumstances. It does not require a cottage *ornée* and a motor, though these are not inconsistent with it, if only they are natural.

I would try to trace what I believe the essence of the simple life to be; it lies very far down in

the spirit, among the roots of life. The first requisite is a perfect sincerity of character. This implies many things: it means a joyful temperance of soul, a certain clearness and strength of temperament. The truly simple person must not be vague and indeterminate, swayed by desire or shifting emotion; he must meet others with a candid frankness, he must have no petty ambitions, he must have wide and genial interests, he must be quick to discern what is beautiful and wise; he must have a clear and straightforward point of view; he must act on his own intuitions and beliefs, not simply try to find out what other people are thinking and try to think it too; he must in short be free from conventionality. The essence of the really simple character is that a man should accept his environment and circle; if he is born in the so-called world, he need not seek to fly from it. Such a character as I have described has a marvellous power of evoking what is sincere and simple in other natures; such a one will tend to believe that other people are as straightforward and genuine as himself; and he will not be wholly mistaken, because when they are with him, they will be simple too. The simple person will have a strong, but not a Pharisaical, sense of duty; he will probably credit other people with the same sense of duty, and he will not often feel

himself bound to disapprove of others, reserving his indignation for any instances of cruelty, meanness, falseness, and selfishness that he may encounter. He will not be suspicious or envious. Yet he will not necessarily be what is called a religious man, because his religion will be rather vital than technical. To be religious in the technical sense of the word—to care, that is, for religious services and solemnities, for priestly influences, for intricate doctrinal emotions—implies a strong artistic sense, and is often very far removed from any simplicity of conduct. But on the other hand, the simple man will have a strong sense of responsibility, a deep confidence in the Will of God and His high purposes.

And thus the simple man will scarcely be a man of leisure, because there is so much that he will desire to do, and which he will feel called upon to do. Whatever he considers to be his work, he will do with a cheerful energy, which will sustain him far beyond the threshold of fatigue. His personal wants will be few; he will not care for spending money for the sake of spending it, but he will be liberal and generous whenever there is need. He will be uneasy in luxury. He will be a lover of the open air and of the country, but his aim will be exercise, and the sense of health and vigour, rather than amusement. He will

never be reduced to asking himself how he is going to spend the day, for the present day, and a long perspective of days ahead, will already be full by anticipation. He will take work, amusement, people, as they come, and he will not be apt to make plans or to arrange parties, because he will expect to find in ordinary life the amusement and the interest that he desires. He will be above all things tender-hearted, kind, and fearless. He will not take fancies to people, or easily discard a friend; but he will be courteous, kind to all weakness, compassionate to awkwardness, fond of children, good-natured, loving laughter and peacefulness; he will not be easily disappointed, and he will have no time to be fretful, if things do not turn out exactly as he desires.

I have known such persons in every rank of life. They are the people who can be depended upon to do what they undertake, to understand the difficulties of others, to sympathise, to help. The essence of it all is a great absence of self-consciousness, and such people as I have described would be genuinely surprised, as a rule, if they were told that they were living a different life from the lives of others.

This simplicity of nature is not often found in conjunction with very great artistic or intellectual

gifts; but when it is so found, it is one of the most perfect combinations in the world.

The one thing that is entirely fatal to simplicity is the desire to stimulate the curiosity of others in the matter. The most conspicuous instance of this, in literature, is the case of Thoreau, who is by many regarded as the apostle of the simple life. Thoreau was a man of extremely simple tastes, it is true. He ate pulse, whatever that may be, and drank water; he was deeply interested in the contemplation of nature, and he loved to disembarrass himself of all the apparatus of life. It was really that he hated trouble more than anything in the world; he found that by working six weeks in the year, he could earn enough to enable him to live in a hut in a wood for the rest of the twelvemonth; he did his household work himself, and his little stock of money sufficed to buy him food and clothes, and to meet his small expenses. But Thoreau was indolent rather than simple; and what spoilt his simplicity was that he was for ever hoping that he would be observed and admired; he was for ever peeping out of the corner of his eye, to see if inquisitive strangers were hovering about to observe the hermit at his contemplation. If he had really loved simplicity best, he would have lived his life and not troubled himself about what other people thought of him;

but instead of that he found his own simplicity a deeply interesting and refreshing subject of contemplation. He was for ever looking at himself in the glass, and describing to others the rugged, sunbrowned, slovenly, solemn person that he saw there.

And then, too, it was easier for Thoreau to make money than it would be for the ordinary artisan. When Thoreau wrote his famous maxim, "To maintain oneself on this earth is not a hardship but a pastime," he did not add that he was himself a man of remarkable mechanical gifts; he made, when he was disposed, admirable pencils, he was an excellent land-surveyor, and an author as well; moreover, he was a celibate by nature. He would no doubt have found, if he had had a wife and children, and no aptitude for skilled labour, that he would have had to work as hard as any one else.

Thoreau had, too, a quality which is in itself an economical thing. He did not care in the least for society. He said that he would rather "keep bachelor's hall in hell than go to board in heaven." He was not a sociable man, and sociability is in itself expensive. He had, it is true, some devoted friends, but it seems that he would have done anything for them except see them. He was a man of many virtues and no vices, but he was

most at his ease with faddists. Not that he avoided his fellow-men; he was always ready to see people, to talk, to play with children, but on the other hand society was not essential to him. Yet, just and virtuous as he was, there was something radically unamiable about him: "I love Henry," one of his friends said of him, "but I cannot like him; and as for taking his arm I should as soon think of taking the arm of an elm-tree." He was in fact an egotist with strong fancies and preferences; and, though he was an ascetic by preference, he cannot be called a simple-minded man, because the essence of simplicity is not to ride a hobby hard. He thought and talked too much about simplicity; and the fact is that simplicity, like humility, cannot exist side by side with self-consciousness. The moment that a man is conscious that he is simple and humble, he is simple and humble no longer. You cannot become humble by reminding people constantly, like Uriah Heep, of your humility; similarly you cannot become simple, by doing elaborately, and making a parade of doing, the things that the simple man would do without thinking about them.

It is almost true to say that the people who are most in love with simplicity are often the most complicated natures. They become weary of their

own complexity, and they fancy that by acting on a certain regimen they can arrive at tranquillity of soul. It is in reality just the other way. One must become simple in soul first, and the simple setting follows as a matter of course. If a man can purge himself of ambition, and social pride, and ostentation, and the desire of praise, his life falls at once into a simple mould, because keeping up appearances is the most expensive thing in the world; to begin with eating pulse and drinking water, is as if a man were to wear his hair like Tennyson, and expect to become a poet thereby. Asceticism is the sign and not the cause of simplicity. The simple life will become easy and common enough when people have simple minds and hearts, when they do the duties that lie ready to their hand, and do not crave for recognition.

Neither can simplicity be brought about by a movement. There is nothing which is more fatal to it than that people should meet to discuss the subject; it can only be done by individuals, and in comparative isolation. A friend of mine dreamed the other day that she was discussing the subject of mission services with a stranger; she defended them in her dream with great warmth and rhetoric: when she had done, her companion said, "Well, to tell you the truth, I don't believe

in people being inspired *in rows*." This oracular saying has a profound truth in it—that salvation is not to be found in public meetings; and that to assemble a number of persons, and to address them on the subject of simplicity, is the surest way to miss the charm of that secluded virtue.

The worst of it is that the real, practical, moral simplicity of which I have been speaking is not an attractive thing to a generation fond of movement and excitement; what they desire is a picturesque *mise-en-scène*, a simplicity which comes as a little pretty interlude to busy life; they do not desire it in its entirety and continuously. They would find it dull, *triste*, *ennuyant*.

Thus it must fall into the hands of individuals to practise it, who are sincerely enamoured of quietness and peace. The simple man must have a deep fund of natural joy and zest; he must bring his own seasoning to the plain fare of life; but if he loves the face of nature, the books, and his fellow-men, and above all, work, there is no need for him to go out into the wilderness in pursuit of a transcendental ideal. But those whose spirits flag and droop in solitude; who open their eyes upon the world, and wonder what they will find to do; who love talk and laughter and amusement; who crave for alcoholic

mirth, and the song of them that feast, had better make no pretence of pursuing a spirit which haunts the country lane and the village street, the rough pasture beside the brimming stream, the forest glade, with the fragrant breeze blowing cool out of the wood. Simplicity, to be successfully attained, must be the result of a passionate instinct, not of a picturesque curiosity; and it is useless to lament that one has no time to possess one's soul, if, when one visits the innermost chamber, there is nothing there but cobwebs and ugly dust.

XV

GAMES

It requires almost more courage to write about games nowadays than it does to write about the Decalogue, because the higher criticism is tending to make a belief in the Decalogue a matter of taste, while to the ordinary Englishman a belief in games is a matter of faith and morals.

I will begin by saying frankly that I do not like games; but I say it, not because any particular interest attaches to my own dislikes and likes, but to raise a little flag of revolt against a species of social tyranny. I believe that there are a good many people who do not like games, but who do not dare to say so. Perhaps it may be thought that I am speaking from the point of view of a person who has never been able to play them. A vision rises in the mind of a spectacled owlish man, trotting feebly about a football field, and making desperate attempts to avoid the proximity of the ball; or joining in a game of cricket, and fielding a drive with the air of a man trying to catch an insect on the ground,

or sitting in a boat with the oar fixed under his chin, being forced backwards with an air of smiling and virtuous confusion. I hasten to say that this is not a true picture. I arrived at a reasonable degree of proficiency in several games: I was a competent, though not a zealous, oar; I captained a college football team, and I do not hesitate to say that I have derived more pleasure from football than from any other form of exercise. I have climbed some mountains, and am even a member of the Alpine Club; I may add that I am a keen, though not a skilful, sportsman, and am indeed rather a martyr to exercise and open air. I make these confessions simply to show that I do not approach the subject from the point of view of a sedentary person but indeed rather the reverse. No weather appears to me to be too bad to go out in, and I do not suppose there are a dozen days in the year in which I do not contrive to get exercise.

But exercise in the open air is one thing, and games are quite another. It seems to me that when a man has reached an age of discretion, he ought no longer to need the stimulus of competition, the desire to hit or kick balls about, the wish to do such things better than other people. It seems to me that the elaborate organisation of athletics is a really rather serious thing, because it makes people unable to get on without some

species of excitement. I was staying the other day at a quiet house in the country, where there was nothing particular to do; there was not, strange to say, even a golf course within reach. There came to stay there for a few days an eminent golfer, who fell into a condition of really pitiable dejection. The idea of taking a walk or riding a bicycle was insupportable to him; and I think he never left the house except for a rueful stroll in the garden. When I was a schoolmaster it used to distress me to find how invariably the parents of boys discoursed with earnestness and solemnity about a boy's games; one was told that a boy was a good field, and really had the makings of an excellent bat; eager inquiries were made as to whether it was possible for the boy to get some professional coaching; in the case of more philosophically inclined parents it generally led on to a statement of the social advantages of being a good cricketer, and often to the expression of a belief that virtue was in some way indissolubly connected with keenness in games. For one parent who said anything about a boy's intellectual interests, there were ten whose preoccupation in the boy's athletics was deep and vital.

It is no wonder that, with all this parental earnestness, boys tended to consider success in games the one paramount object of their lives; it

was all knit up with social ambitions, and it was viewed, I do not hesitate to say, as of infinitely more importance than anything else. I do not mean to say that many of the boys did not consider it important to be good, and did not desire to be conscientious about their work. But as a practical matter games were what they thought about and talked about, and what aroused genuine enthusiasm. They were disposed to despise boys who could not play games, however virtuous, kindly, and sensible they might be; an entire lack of conscientiousness, and even grave moral obliquity, were apt to be condoned in the case of a successful athlete. We masters, I must frankly confess, did not make any serious attempt to fight the tendency. We spent our spare time in walking about the cricket and football fields, in looking on, in discussing the fine nuances in the style of individual players. It was very natural to take an interest in the thing which was to the boys a matter of profound concern; but what I should be inclined to censure was that it was really a matter of profound concern with ourselves; and we did not take a kindly and paternal interest in the matter, so much as the interest of enthusiasts and partisans.

It is very difficult to see how to alter this. Probably, like other deep-seated national ten-

dencies, it will have to cure itself. It would be impossible to insist that the educators of youth should suppress the interest which they instinctively and genuinely feel in games, and profess an interest in intellectual matters which they do not really feel. No good would come out of practising hypocrisy in the matter, from however high a motive. While schoolmasters rush off to golf whenever they get a chance, and fill their holidays to the brim with games of various kinds, it would be simply hypocritical to attempt to conceal the truth; and the difficulty is increased by the fact that, while parents and boys alike feel as they do about the essential importance of games, head-masters are more or less bound to select men for masterships who are proficient in them; because whatever else has to be attended to at school, games have to be attended to; and, moreover, a man whom the boys respect as an athlete is likely to be more effective both as a disciplinarian and a teacher. If a man is a first-rate slow bowler, the boys will consider his views on Thucydides and Euclid more worthy of consideration than the views of a man who has only a high university degree.

The other day I was told of the case of a head-master of a small proprietary private school, who was treated with open insolence and contempt by one of his assistants, who neglected his

work, smoked in his class-room, and even absented himself on occasions without leave. It may be asked why the head-master did not dismiss his recalcitrant assistant. It was because he had secured a man who was a 'Varsity cricket-blue, and whose presence on the staff gave the parents confidence, and provided an excellent advertisement. The assistant, on the other hand, knew that he could get a similar post for the asking, and on the whole preferred a school where he might consult his own convenience. This is, of course, an extreme case; but would to God, as Dr. Johnson said, that it were an impossible one! I do not wish to tilt against athletics, nor do I at all undervalue the benefits of open air and exercise for growing boys. But surely there is a lamentable want of proportion about the whole view! The truth is that we English are in many respects barbarians still, and as we happen at the present time to be wealthy barbarians, we devote our time and our energies to the things for which we really care. I do not at all want to see games diminished, or played with less keenness. I only desire to see them duly subordinated. I do not think it ought to be considered slightly eccentric for a boy to care very much about his work, or to take an interest in books. I should like it to be recognised at

schools that the one quality that was admirable was keenness, and that it was admirable in whatever department it was displayed; but nowadays keenness about games is considered admirable and heroic, while keenness about work or books is considered slightly grovelling and priggish.

The same spirit has affected what is called sport. People no longer look upon it as an agreeable interlude, but as a business in itself; they will not accept invitations to shoot, unless the sport is likely to be good; a moderate performer with the gun is treated as if it was a crime for him to want to shoot at all; then the motoring craze has come in upon the top of the golfing craze; and all the spare time of people of leisure tends to be filled up with bridge. The difficulty in dealing with the situation is that the thing itself is not only not wrong, but really beneficial; it is better to be occupied than to be idle, and it is hard to preach against a thing which is excellent in moderation and only mischievous in excess.

Personally I am afraid that I only look upon games as a *pis-aller*. I would always rather take a walk than play golf, and read a book than play bridge. Bridge, indeed, I should regard as only one degree better than absolutely vacuous conversation, which is certainly the

most fatiguing thing in the world. But the odd thing is that while it is regarded as rather vicious to do nothing, it is regarded as positively virtuous to play a game. Personally I think competition always a more or less disagreeable thing. I dislike it in real life, and I do not see why it should be introduced into one's amusements. If it amuses me to do a thing, I do not very much care whether I do it better than another person. I have no desire to be always comparing my skill with the skill of others.

Then, too, I am afraid that I must confess to a lamentably feeble pleasure in mere country sights and sounds. I love to watch the curious and beautiful things that go on in every hedgerow and every field; it is a ceaseless delight to see the tender uncrumpling leaves of the copse in spring, and no less a pleasure to see the woodland streaked and strained with the flaming glories of autumn. It is a joy in high midsummer to see the clear dwindled stream run under the thick hazels, among the lush water-plants; it is no less a joy to see the same stream running full and turbid in winter, when the banks are bare, and the trees are leafless, and the pasture is wrinkled with frost. Half the joy, for instance, of shooting, in which I frankly confess I take a childish delight, is the

quiet tramping over the clean-cut stubble, the distant view of field and wood, the long, quiet wait at the covert-end, where the spindle-wood hangs out her quaint rosy berries, and the rabbits come scampering up the copse, as the far-off tapping of the beaters draws near in the frosty air. The delights of the country-side grow upon me every month and every year. I love to stroll in the lanes in spring, with white clouds floating in the blue above, and to see the glade carpeted with steel-blue hyacinths. I love to walk on country roads or by woodland paths, on a rain-drenched day of summer, when the sky is full of heavy inky clouds, and the earth smells fresh and sweet; I love to go briskly homeward on a winter evening, when the sunset smoulders low in the west, when the pheasants leap trumpeting to their roosts, and the lights begin to peep in cottage windows.

Such joys as these are within the reach of every one; and to call the country dull because one has not the opportunity of hitting and pursuing a little white ball round and round among the same fields, with elaborately contrived obstacles to test the skill and the temper, seems to me to be grotesque, if it were not also so distressing.

I cannot help feeling that games are things

that are appropriate to the restless days of boyhood, when one will take infinite trouble and toil over anything of the nature of a make-believe, so long as it is understood not to be work; but as one gets older and perhaps wiser, a simpler and quieter range of interests ought to take their place. I can humbly answer for it that it need imply no loss of zest; my own power of enjoyment is far deeper and stronger than it was in early years; the pleasures I have described, of sight and sound, mean infinitely more to me than the definite occupations of boyhood ever did. But the danger is that if we are brought up ourselves to depend upon games, and if we bring up all our boys to depend on them, we are not able to do without them as we grow older; and thus we so often have the melancholy spectacle of the elderly man, who is hopelessly bored with existence, and who is the terror of the smoking-room and the dinner-table, because he is only capable of indulging in lengthy reminiscences of his own astonishing athletic performances, and in lamentations over the degeneracy of the human race.

Another remarkable fact about the conventionality that attends games is that certain games are dismissed as childish and contemptible while

others are crowned with glory and worship. One knows of eminent clergymen who play golf; and that they should do so seems to constitute so high a title to the respect and regard with which normal persons view them, that one sometimes wonders whether they do not take up the practice with the wisdom of the serpent that is recommended in the gospels, or because of the Pauline doctrine of adaptability, that by all means they may save some.

But as far as mere air and exercise goes, the childish game of playing at horses is admirably calculated to increase health and vigour and needs no expensive resources. Yet what would be said and thought if a prelate and his suffragan ran nimbly out of a palace gate in a cathedral close, with little bells tinkling, whips cracking, and reins of red ribbon drawn in to repress the curvetting of the gaitered steed? There is nothing in reality more undignified about that than in hitting a little ball about over sandy bunkers. If the Prime Minister and the Lord Chief Justice trundled hoops round and round after breakfast in the gravelled space behind the Horse Guards, who could allege that they would not be the better for the exercise? Yet they would be held for some mysterious reason to have forfeited respect. To the mind of the philosopher

all games are either silly or reasonable; and nothing so reveals the stupid conventionality of the ordinary mind as the fact that men consider a series of handbooks on Great Bowlers to be a serious and important addition to literature, while they would hold that a little manual on Blind-man's Buff was a fit subject for derision. St. Paul said that when he became a man he put away childish things. He could hardly afford to say that now, if he hoped to be regarded as a man of sense and weight.

I do not wish to be a mere Jeremiah in the region of prophecy, and to deplore, sarcastically and incisively, what I cannot amend. What I rather wish to do is to make a plea for greater simplicity in the matter, and to try and destroy some of the terrible priggishness in the matter of athletics which appears to me to prevail. After all, athletics are only one form of leisurely amusement; and I maintain that it is of the essence of priggishness to import solemnity into a matter which does not need it, and which would be better without it. Because the tyranny is a real one; the man of many games is not content with simply enjoying them; he has a sense of complacent superiority, and a hardly disguised contempt for the people who do not play them.

I was staying in a house the other day where a

distinguished philosopher had driven over to pay an afternoon call. The call concluded, he wished to make a start, so I went down to the stable with him to see about putting his pony in. The stables were deserted. I was forced to confess that I knew nothing about the harnessing of steeds, however humble. We discovered portions of what appeared to be the equipment of a pony, and I held them for him, while he gingerly tried them on, applying them cautiously to various portions of the innocent animal's person. Eventually we had to give it up as a bad job, and seek for professional assistance. I described the scene for the benefit of a lively lady of my acquaintance, who is a devotee of anything connected with horses, and she laughed unmercifully at the description, and expressed the contempt, which she sincerely felt, in no measured terms. But, after all, it is no part of my business to harness horses; it is a convenience that there should be persons who possess the requisite knowledge; for me horses only represent a convenient form of locomotion. I did not mind her being amused—indeed, that was the object of my narrative—but her contempt was just as much misplaced as if I had despised her for not being able to tell the difference between sapphics and alcaics, which it was my business to know.

It is the complacency, the self-satisfaction, that results from the worship of games, which is one of its most serious features. I wish with all my heart that I could suggest a remedy for it; but the only thing that I can do is to pursue my own inclinations, with a fervent conviction that they are at least as innocent as the pursuit of athletic exercises; and I can also, as I have said, wave a little flag of revolt, and rally to my standard the quieter and more simple-minded persons, who love their liberty, and decline to part with it unless they can find a better reason than the merely comfortable desire to do what every one else is doing.

XVI

SPIRITUALISM

I WAS sitting the other day in a vicarage garden with my friend the vicar. It was a pretty, well-kept place, with old shrubberies and umbrageous trees; to the right, the tower of the church rose among its elms. We sate out of the wind, looking over a rough pasture field, apparently a common, divided from the garden by a little ha-ha of brick. The surface of the field was very irregular, as though there had been excavations made in it for gravel at some time or other; in certain parts of the field there appeared fragments of a stone wall, just showing above the ground.

The vicar pointed to the field. "Do you see that wall?" he said; "I will tell you a very curious story about that. When I came here, forty years ago, I asked the old gardener what the field was, as I never saw any one in it, or any beasts grazing there; and yet it was unfenced, and appeared to be common land—it was full of little thickets and thorn-bushes then. He was not very willing to

tell me, I thought, but by dint of questions I discovered that it was a common, and that it was known locally by the curious name of *Heaven's Walls*. He went on to say that it was considered unlucky to set foot in it; and that, as a matter of fact, no villager would ever dream of going there; he would not say why, but at last it came out that it was supposed to be haunted by a spirit. No one, it seemed, had ever seen anything there, but it was an unlucky place.

"Well, I thought no more of it at the time, though I often went into the field. It was a quiet and pretty place enough; full of thickets, as I have said, where the birds built unmolested—there was generally a goldfinch's nest there.

"It became necessary to lay a drain across it, and a big trench was dug. One day they came and told me that the workmen had found something—would I go and look at it? I went out and found that they had unearthed a large Roman cinerary urn, containing some calcined bones. I told the lord of the manor, who is a squire in the next parish, and he and I after that kept a look-out over the workmen. We found another urn, and another, both full of bones. Then we found a big glass vessel, also containing bones. The squire got interested in the thing, and eventually had the whole place dug out. We found a

large enclosure, once surrounded by a stone wall, of which you see the remains; in two of the corners there was an enormous deposit of wood ashes, in deep pits, which looked as if great fires had burnt there; and the walls in those two corners were all calcined and smoke-stained. We found fifty or sixty urns, all full of bones; and in another corner there was a deep shaft, like a well, dug in the chalk, with hand-holds down the sides, also full of calcined bones. We found a few coins, and in one place a conglomeration of rust that looked as if it might have been a heap of tools or weapons. We set the antiquaries to work, and they pronounced it to be what is called a Roman *Ustrinum*—that is to say, a public crematorium, where people who could not afford a separate funeral might bring a corpse to be burnt. If they had no place to deposit the urn, in which the bones were enclosed, they were allowed, it seems, to bury the urn there, until such time as they cared to remove it. There was a big Roman settlement here, you know. There was a fort on the hill there, and the sites of several large Roman villas have been discovered in the neighbourhood. This place must have stood rather lonely, away from the town, probably in the wood which then covered the whole of this county; but it is curious, is it not?" said the vicar, "that the

tradition should have been handed down through all these centuries of its being an ill-omened place, long after any tradition of what the uses of the spot were ? "

It was curious indeed ! The vicar was presently called away, and I sate musing over the strange old story. I could fancy the place as it must have been, standing with its high blank walls in a clearing of the forest, with perhaps a great column of evil-smelling smoke drifting in oily waves over the corner of the wall, telling of the sad rites that were going on within. I could fancy heavy-eyed mourners dragging a bier up to the gates, with a silent form lying upon it, waiting in pale dismay until the great doors were flung open by the sombre rough attendants of the place ; until they could see the ugly enclosure, with the wood piled high in the pit for the last sad service. Then would follow the burning and the drenching of the ashes, the gathering of the bones—all that was left of one so dear, father or mother, boy or maiden—the enclosing of them in the urn, and the final burial. What agonies of simple grief the place must have witnessed ! Then, I suppose, the place was deserted by the Romans, the walls crumbled down into ruin, grass and bushes grew over the place. Then perhaps the forest was gradually

felled and stubbed up, as the area of cultivation widened; but still the sad tradition of the spot left it desolate, until all recollection of its purpose was gone. No doubt, in Saxon days, it was thought to be haunted by the old wailing, restless spirits of those who had suffered the last rites there; so that still the place was condemned to a sinister solitude.

I went on to reflect over the strange and obstinate tradition that lingers still with such vitality among the human race, that certain places are haunted by the spirits of the dead. It is hard to believe that such tradition, so widespread, so universal, should have no kind of justification in fact. And yet there appears to be no justification for the idea, unless the spiritual conditions of the world have altered, unless there were real phenomena which have for some cause ceased to manifest themselves, which originated the tradition. But there is certainly no scientific evidence of the fact. The Psychical Society, which has faced some ridicule for its serious attempt to find out the truth about these matters, have announced that investigations of so-called haunted houses have produced no evidence whatever. They seem to be a wholly unreliable type of stories, which always break down under careful inquiry. I am inclined myself to believe

that such stories arose in a perfectly natural way. It is perfectly natural to simple people to believe that the spirit which animated a mortal body would, on leaving it, tend to linger about the scene of suffering and death. Indeed, it is impossible not to feel that, if the spirit has any conscious identity, it would be sure to desire to remain in the neighbourhood of those whom it loved so well. But the unsatisfactory element in these stories is that it generally appears to be the victim of some heinous deed, and not the perpetrator, who is condemned to make its sad presence known, by wailing and by sorrowful gestures, on the scene of its passion. But once given the belief that a spirit might tend to remain for a time in the place where its earthly life was lived, the terrors of man, his swift imagination, his power of self-delusion, would do the rest.

The only class of stories, say the investigators, which appear to be proved beyond the possibility of reasonable doubt, is the class of stories dealing with apparitions at the time of death; and this they explain by supposing a species of telepathy, which is indeed an obscure force, but obviously an existing one, though its conditions and limitations are not clearly understood. Telepathy is the power of communication between mind and mind without the medium of speech,

and indeed in certain cases exercised at an immense distance. The theory is that the thought of the dying person is so potently exercised on some particular living person, as to cause the recipient to project a figure of the other upon the air. That power of visualisation is not a very uncommon one; indeed, we all possess it more or less; we can all remember what we believe we have seen in our dreams, and we remember the figures of our dreams as optical images, though they have been purely mental conceptions, translated into the terms of actual sight. The impression of a dream-figure, indeed, appears to us to be as much the impression of an image received upon the retina of the eye, as our impressions of images actually so received. The whole thing is strange, of course, but not stranger than wireless telegraphy. It may be that the conditions of telepathy may some day be scientifically defined; and in that case it will probably make a clear and coherent connection between a number of phenomena which we do not connect together, just as the discovery of electricity connected together phenomena which all had observed, like the adhering of substances to charged amber, as well as the lightning-flash which breaks from the thunder-cloud. No one in former days traced any connection between

these two phenomena, but we now know that they are only two manifestations of the same force. In the same way we may find that phenomena of which we are all conscious, but of which we do not know the reason, may prove to be manifestations of some central telepathic force—such phenomena, I mean, as the bravery of armies in action, or the excitement which may seize upon a large gathering of men.

We ought, I think, to admire and praise the patient work of the Psychical Society,—though it is common enough to hear quite sensible people deride it,—because it is an attempt to treat a subject scientifically. What we have every right to deride is the dabbling in spiritualistic things by credulous and feeble-minded persons. These practices open to our view one of the most lamentable and deplorable provinces of the human mind, its power of convincing itself of anything which it desires to believe, its debility, its childishness. If the professions of so-called mediums were true, why cannot they exhibit their powers in some open and incontestable way, not surrounding themselves with all the conditions of darkness and excitability, in which the human power of self-delusion finds its richest field ?

A friend of mine told me the other day what

he evidently felt to be an extremely impressive story about a dignitary of the Church. This clergyman was overcome one day by an intense mental conviction that he was wanted at Bristol. He accordingly went there by train, wandered about aimlessly, and finally put up at a hotel for the night. In the morning he found a friend in the coffee-room, to whom he confided the cause of his presence in Bristol, and announced his intention of going away by the next train. The friend then told him that an Australian was dying in the hotel, and that his wife was very anxious to find a clergyman. The dignitary went to see the lady, with the intention of offering her his services, when he discovered that he had met her when travelling in Australia, and that her husband had been deeply impressed by a sermon which he had then delivered, and had been entreating for some days that he might be summoned to administer the last consolations of religion. The clergyman went in to see the patient, administered the last rites, comforted and encouraged him, and was with him when he died. He afterwards told the widow the story of his mysterious summons to Bristol, and she replied that she had been praying night and day that he might come, and that he had no doubt come in answer to her prayers.

But the unsatisfactory part of the story is that one is asked to condone the extremely unbusiness-like, sloppy, and troublesome methods employed by this spiritual agency. The lady knew the name and position of the clergyman perfectly well, and might have written or wired to him. He could thus have been spared his aimless and mysterious journey, the expense of spending a night at the hotel; and moreover it was only the fortuitous meeting with a third person, not closely connected with the story, which prevented the clergyman from leaving the place, his mission unfulfilled. One cannot help feeling that, if a spiritual agency was at work, it was working either in a very clumsy way, or with a relish for mystery which reminds one of the adventures of Sherlock Holmes; if one is expected to accept the story as a manifestation of supernatural power, one can only conceive of it as the work of a very tricksy spirit, like Ariel in *The Tempest;* it seems like a very elaborate and melodramatic attempt to bring about a result, that could have been far more satisfactorily achieved by a little common sense. If instead of inspiring the lady to earnest prayer—which appears too to have been very slow in its action—why could not the supernatural power at work have inspired her with the much simpler idea of looking at the Clergy List? And yet the story no doubt produces

on the ordinary mind an impressive effect, when as a matter of fact, if it is fairly considered, it can only be regarded, if true, as the work of an amiable and rather dilettante power, with a strong relish for the elaborately marvellous.

The truth is that what the ordinary human being desires, in matters of this kind, is not scientific knowledge but picturesqueness. As long as people frankly confess that it is the latter element of which they are in search, that, like the fat boy in *Pickwick*, they merely want to make their flesh creep, no harm is done. The harm is done by people who are really in search of sensation, who yet profess to be approaching the question in a scientific spirit of inquiry. I enjoy a good ghost story as much as any one; and I am interested, too, in hearing the philosophical conclusions of earnest-minded people; but to hear the question discussed, as one so often hears it, with a pretentious attempt to treat it scientifically, by people, who, like the White Queen in *Through the Looking-glass*, find it pleasant to train themselves to believe a dozen impossible things before breakfast, afflicts me with a deep mental and moral nausea.

One, at least, of the patient investigators of this accumulated mass of human delusion, took up the quest in the hope that he might receive scientific

evidence of the continued existence of identity. He was forced to confess that the evidence went all the other way, and that all the tales which appeared to substantiate the fact, were hopelessly discredited. The only thing, as I have said, that the investigations seem to have substantiated, is evidence which none but a determinedly sceptical mind would disallow, that there does exist, in certain abnormal cases, a possibility of direct communication between two or more living minds.

But, as I pondered thus, the day began to darken over the rough pasture with its ruined wall, and I felt creeping upon me that old inheritance of humanity, that terror in the presence of the unseen, which sets the mind at work, distorting and exaggerating the impressions of eye and ear. How easy, in such a mood, to grow tense and expectant—

> "Till sight and hearing ache
> For something that may keep
> The awful inner sense
> Unroused, lest it should mark
> The life that haunts the emptiness
> And horror of the dark."

Face to face with the impenetrable mystery, with the thought of those whom we have loved, who have slipt without a word or a sign over the dark threshold, what wonder if we beat with un-

availing hands against the closed door? It would be strange if we did not, for we too must some day enter in; well, the souls of all those who have died, alike those whom we have loved, and the spirits of those old Romans whose mortal bodies melted into smoke year after year in the little enclosure into which I look, know whatever there is to know. That is a stern and dreadful truth; the secret is impenetrably sealed from us; but, "though the heart ache to contemplate it, it is there."

XVII

HABITS

WALTER PATER says, in his most oracular mood, in that fine manifesto of a lofty Epicureanism which is known as the *Conclusion* to the *Renaissance* essays, that to form habits is failure in life. The difficulty in uttering oracles is that one is obliged for the sake of being forcible to reduce a statement to its simplest terms; and when one does that, there are generally a whole group of cases which appear to be covered by the statement, which contradict it. It is nearly impossible to make any general statement both simple enough and large enough. In the case of Pater's pronouncement, he had fixed his mental gaze so firmly on a particular phenomenon, that he forgot that his words might prove misleading when applied to the facts of life. What he meant, no doubt, was that one of the commonest of mental dangers is to form intellectual and moral prejudices early in life, and so to stereotype them that we are unable to

look round them, or to give anything that we instinctively dislike a fair trial. Most people in fact, in matters of opinion, tend to get infected with a species of Toryism by the time that they reach middle age, until they get into the frame of mind which Montaigne describes, of thinking so highly of their own conjectures as to be prepared to burn other people for not regarding them as certainties. This frame of mind is much to be reprobated, but it is unhappily common. How often does one meet sensible, shrewd, and intelligent men, who say frankly that they are not prepared to listen to any evidence which tells against their beliefs! How rare it is to meet a man who in the course of an argument will say, "Well, I had never thought of that before; it must be taken into account, and it modifies my view"! Such an attitude is looked upon by active-minded and energetic men as having something weak and even sentimental about it. How common it is to hear people say that a man ought to have the courage of his opinions! how rare it is to find a man who will say that one ought to have the courage to change one's opinions! Indeed, in public life it is generally considered a kind of treachery to change, because people value what they call loyalty above truth. Pater no doubt meant that the duty and

privilege of the philosopher is to keep his inner eye open to new impressions, to be ready to see beauty in new forms, not to love comfortable and settled ways, but to bring the same fresh apprehension that youth brings, to art and to life.

He is merely speaking of a mental process in these words; what he is condemning is the dulling and encrusting of the mind with prejudices and habits, the tendency, as Charles Lamb wittily said, whenever a new book comes out, to read an old one, to get into the fireside-and-slippers frame of mind, to grumble at novelty, to complain that the young men are violating all the sacred canons of faith and art.

This is not at all the same thing as knowing one's own limitations; every one, whether he be artist or writer, critic or practitioner, ought to take the measure of his forces, and to determine in what regions he can be effective; indeed, it is often necessary for a man of artistic impulses to confine his energies to one specific department, although he may be attracted by several. Pater was himself an instance of this. He knew, for instance, that his dramatic sense was weak, and he wisely let drama alone; he found that certain vigorous writers exercised a contagious influence over his own style, and therefore he gave up reading them. But within his own region he

endeavoured to be catholic and sympathetic; he never tied up the contents of his mind into packets and labelled them, a task which most men between thirty and forty find highly congenial.

But I desire here to go into the larger question of forming habits; and as a general rule it may be said that Pater's dictum is entirely untrue, and that success in life depends more upon forming habits than upon anything else, except good health. Indeed, Pater himself is an excellent instance in point. He achieved his large output of beautiful literary work, the amazing amount of perfectly finished and exquisitely expressed writing that he gave to the world, by an extreme and patient regularity of labour. He did not, as some writers do, have periods of energetic creation, interrupted by periods of fallow idleness. Perhaps his work might have been more spontaneous if he could, like Milton's friend, have been wise enough "of such delights to judge, and interpose them oft." But the achievement of Pater was to realise and to carry out his own individual method, and it is upon doing this that successful productivity depends.

I could name, if I chose, two or three friends of my own, men of high and subtle intelligence, admirable humour, undiminished zest, who have failed, and will fail, to realise their possibilities,

simply by a lack of method. Who does not know the men whom Mr. Mallock so wittily describes, of whom, up to the age of forty, their friends say that they could do anything if they only chose, and after the age of forty that they could have done anything if they had chosen? I have one particular friend in my eye at this moment, the possessor of wealth and leisure, who is a born writer if any man ever was. He has no particular duties, except the duties of a small landowner and the father of a family; he is a wide reader, and a critic of delicate and sympathetic acuteness. He is bent on writing; and he has written a single book crammed from end to end with good and beautiful things, the stuff of which would have sufficed, in the hands of a facile writer, for half-a-dozen excellent books. He is, moreover, sincerely anxious to write, but he does nothing. If you ask him—and I conceive it to be my duty at intervals to chide him for not producing more—what he does with his time, he says with a melancholy smile: "Oh, I hardly know: it goes!" I trace his failure to produce, simply to the fact that he has never set apart any particular portion of the day for writing; he allows himself to be interrupted; he entertains many guests whom he has no particular wish to see; he "sets around and looks ornery,"

like the frog; he talks delightfully; an industrious Boswell could, by asking him questions and taking careful notes of his talk, fill a charming volume in a month out of his shrewd and suggestive conversation; of course it is possible to say that he practises the art of living, to talk of "gems of purest ray serene" and flowers "born to blush unseen" and all the rest of it. But his talk streams to waste among guests who do not as a rule appreciate it; and if there is any duty or responsibility in the world at all, it is a duty for men of great endowments, admirable humour, and poetical suggestiveness, to sow the seed of the mind freely and lavishly. We English are of course the chosen race; but we should be none the worse for a little more intellectual apprehension, a little more amiable charm. If my friend had been a professional man, obliged to earn a living by his pen, he would, I do not doubt, have given to the world a series of great books, which would have done something to spread the influence of the kingdom of heaven.

Of course there is a sense in which it is a mistake to let habits become too tyrannical; one ought not to find oneself hopelessly distracted and irritated if one's daily programme is interfered with at any point; one ought to be able

to enjoy leisure, to pay visits, to converse volubly. Like Dr. Johnson, one ought to be ready for a frolic. But, on the other hand, if a man takes himself seriously—and I am here not speaking of people with definite engagements, but of people, like writers and artists, who may choose their own times to do their work—he ought to have a regular though not an invariable programme. If he is possessed of such superabundant energy as Walter Scott possessed, he may rise at five, and write ten immortal octavo pages before he appears at breakfast. But as a rule the vitality of ordinary people is more limited, and they are bound to husband it, if they mean to do anything that is worth the name; an artist then ought to have his sacred hours, secure from interruption; and then let him fill the rest of the day with any amusement that he finds to be congenial.

Of course the thing is easy enough if one's work is really the thing in which one is most interested. There is very little danger, in the case of a man who likes and relishes the work he is doing more than he relishes any form of amusement; but we many of us have the unhappy feeling that we enjoy our work very much, if we can once sit down to it; only we do not care about beginning it. We read the paper, we write a few letters, we look out an address in

Who's Who, and we become absorbed in the biographies of our fellow-men; very soon it is time for luncheon, and then we think that we shall feel fresher if we take a little exercise; after tea, the weather is so beautiful that we think it would be a pity not to enjoy the long sunset lights; we come in; the piano stands invitingly open, and we must strike a few chords; then the bell rings for dressing, and the day is gone, because we mistrust the work that we do late at night, and so we go to bed in good time. Not so does a big book get written!

We ought rather to find out all about ourselves; when we can work our best, how long we can work continuously with full vigour; and then round these fixed points we should group our sociability, our leisure, our amusement. If we are altruistically inclined, we probably say that it is a duty to see something of our fellow-creatures, that we ought not to grow morose and solitary; there is an abundance of excuses that can be made; but the artist and the writer ought to realise that their duty to the world is to perceive what is beautiful and to express it as resolutely, as attractively as they can; if a writer can write a good book, he can talk in its pages to a numerous audience; and he is right to save up his best thoughts for his readers, rather than to let them

flow away in diffuse conversation. Of course a writer of fiction is bound to make the observation of varieties of temperament a duty; it is his material; if he becomes isolated and self-absorbed, his work becomes narrow and mannerised; and it is true, too, that, with most writers, the collision of mind with mind is what produces the brightest sparks.

And then to step into a still wider field, there is no sort of doubt that the formation of reasonable habits, of method, of punctuality, is a duty, not from an exalted point of view, but because it makes enormously for the happiness and convenience of every one about us. In the old-fashioned story-books a prodigious value, perhaps an exaggerated value, was set upon time; one was told to redeem the time, whatever that might mean. The ideal mother of the family, in the little books which I used to read in my childhood, was a lady who appeared punctually at breakfast, and had a bunch of keys hanging at her girdle. Breakfast over, she paid a series of visits, looked into the larder, weighed out stores, and then settled down to some solid reading or embroidered a fire-screen; the afternoon would be spent in visits of benevolence, carrying portions of the midday dinner to her poorer neighbours; the evening would be given to working at the

fire-screen again, while some one read aloud. Somehow it is not an attractive picture, though it need not have been so dull as it appears. The point is whether the solid reading had a useful effect or not. In the books I have in view, it generally led the materfamilias into having an undue respect for correct information, and a pharisaical contempt for people who indulged their fancy. In *Harry and Lucy*, for instance, Lucy, who is the only human figure in the book, is perpetually being snubbed by the terrible hard-headed Harry, with his desperate interest in machinery, by the repellent father who delights to explain the laws of gravity and the parabola described by the stone which Harry throws. What was undervalued in those old, dry, high-principled books was the charm of vivid apprehension, of fanciful imagination, of simple, neighbourly kindliness. The aim was too much to improve everybody and everything, to impart and retain correct information. Nowadays the pendulum has swung a little too far the other way, and children are too much encouraged, if anything, to be childish; but there is a certain austere charm in the old simple high-minded household life for all that.

The point is that habit should be there, like the hem of a handkerchief, to keep the fabric

together; but that it should not be relentlessly and oppressively paraded; the triumph is to have habits and to conceal them, just as in Ruskin's celebrated dictum, that the artist's aim should be to be fit for the best society, and then that he should renounce it. One ought to be reliable, to perform the work that one undertakes without ceaseless reminders, to discharge duties easily and satisfactorily; and then, if to this one can add the grace of apparent leisureliness, the power of never appearing to be interrupted, the good-humoured readiness to amuse and to be amused, one is high upon the ladder of perfection. It is absolutely necessary, if one is to play a satisfactory part in the world, to be in earnest, to be serious; and it is no less necessary to abstain from ostentatiously parading that seriousness. One has to take for granted that others are serious too; and far more is effected by example than by precept, in this, as in most matters. But if one cannot do both, it is better to be serious and to show it, than to make a show of despising seriousness and decrying it. It is better to have habits and to let others know it, than to lose one's soul by endeavouring to escape the reproach of priggishness, a quality which in these easy-going days incurs an excessive degree of odium.

XVIII

RELIGION

THERE is a motto which I should like to see written over the door of every place of worship, both as an invitation and a warning: THOU SHALT MAKE ME TO UNDERSTAND WISDOM SECRETLY. It is an invitation to those who enter, to come and participate in a great and holy mystery; and it is a warning to those who believe that in the formalities of religion alone is the secret of religion to be found. I will not here speak of worship, of the value of the symbol, the winged prayer, the uttered word; I wish rather to speak for a little of religion itself, a thing, as I believe, greatly misunderstood. How much it is misunderstood may be seen from the fact that, though the word itself, religion, stands for one of the most beautiful and simple things in the world, there yet hangs about it an aroma which is not wholly pleasing. What difficult service that great and humble name has seen! With what strange and evil meanings it has been charged! How dinted and battered it is

with hard usage! how dimmed its radiance, how stained its purity! It is the best word, perhaps the only word, for the thing that I mean; and yet something dusty and technical hangs about it, which makes it wearisome instead of delightful, dreary rather than joyful. The same is the case with many of the words which stand for great things. They have been weapons in the hands of dry, bigoted, offensive persons, until their brightness is clouded, their keen edge hacked and broken.

By religion I mean the power, whatever it be, which makes a man choose what is hard rather than what is easy, what is lofty and noble rather than what is mean and selfish; that puts courage into timorous hearts, and gladness into clouded spirits; that consoles men in grief, misfortune, and disappointment; that makes them joyfully accept a heavy burden; that, in a word, uplifts men out of the dominion of material things, and sets their feet in a purer and simpler region.

Yet this great thing, which lies so near us that we can take it into our grasp by merely reaching out a hand; which is as close to us as the air and the sunlight, has been by the sad, misguided efforts, very often of the best and noblest-minded men, who knew how precious a thing it was, so guarded, so wrapped up, made so remote from, so

alien to, life and thought, that many people who live by its light, and draw it in as simply as the air they breathe, never even know that they have come within hail of it. "Is he a good man?" said a simple Methodist once, in reply to a question about a friend. "Yes, he is good, but not religious-good." By which he meant that he lived kindly, purely, and unselfishly as a Christian should, but did not attend any particular place of worship, and therefore could not be held to have any religious motive for his actions, but was guided by a mere worthless instinct, a preference for unworldly living.

Now, if ever there was a Divine attempt made in the world to shake religion free of its wrappings, it was the preaching of Christ. So far as we can gather from records of obscure and mysterious origin, transcriptions, it would seem, of something oral and traditional, Christ aimed at bringing religion within the reach of the humblest and simplest souls. Whatever doubt men may feel as to the literal accuracy of these records in matters of fact, however much it may be held that the relation of incidents was coloured by the popular belief of the time in the possibility of miraculous manifestations, yet the words and sayings of Christ emerge from the narrative, though in places it seems as though they had been imperfectly appre-

hended, as containing and expressing thoughts quite outside the range of the minds that recorded them; and thus possess an authenticity, which is confirmed and proved by the immature mental grasp of those who compiled the records, in a way in which it would not have been proved, if the compilers had been obviously men of mental acuteness and far-reaching philosophical grasp.

To express the religion of Christ in precise words would be a mighty task; but it may be said that it was not merely a system, nor primarily a creed; it was a message to individual hearts, bewildered by the complexity of the world and the intricacy of religious observances. Christ bade men believe that their Creator was also a Father; that the only way to escape from the overwhelming difficulties presented by the world was the way of simplicity, sincerity, and love; that a man should keep out of his life all that insults and hurts the soul, and that he should hold the interests of others as dear as he holds his own. It was a protest against all ambition, and cruelty, and luxury, and self-conceit. It showed that a man should accept his temperament and his place in life, as gifts from the hands of his Father; and that he should then be peaceful, pure, humble, and loving. Christ brought into the world an entirely new standard; He showed that many respected

and reverenced persons were very far indeed from the Father; while many obscure, sinful, miserable outcasts found the secret which the respectable and contemptuous missed. Never was there a message which cast so much hope abroad in rich handfuls to the world. The astonishing part of the revelation was that it was so absolutely simple; neither wealth, nor intellect, nor position, nor even moral perfection, were needed. The simplest child, the most abandoned sinner, could take the great gift as easily as the most honoured statesman, the wisest sage—indeed more easily; for it was the very complexity of affairs, of motives, of wealth, that entangled the soul and prevented it from realising its freedom.

Christ lived His human life on these principles; and sank from danger to danger, from disaster to disaster, and having touched the whole gamut of human suffering, and disappointment, and shame, died a death in which no element of disgust, and terror, and pain was wanting.

And from that moment the deterioration began. At first the great secret ran silently through the world from soul to soul, till the world was leavened. But even so the process of capturing and transforming the faith in accordance with human weakness began. The intellectual spirit laid hold on it first. Metaphysicians scrutinised the humble and

sweet mystery, overlaid it with definitions, harmonised it with ancient systems, dogmatised it, made it hard, and subtle, and uninspiring. Vivid metaphors and illustrations were seized upon and converted into precise statements of principles. The very misapprehensions of the original hearers were invested with the same sanctity that belonged to the Master Himself. But even so the bright and beautiful spirit made its way, like a stream of clear water, refreshing thirsty places and making the desert bloom like the rose, till at last the world itself, in the middle of its luxuries and pomp, became aware that here was a mighty force abroad which must be reckoned with ; and then the world itself determined upon the capture of Christianity ; and how sadly it succeeded can be read in the pages of history ; until at last the pure creature, like a barbarian captive, bright with youth and beauty, was bound with golden chains, and bidden, bewildered and amazed, to grace the triumph and ride in the very chariot of its conqueror.

Let me take one salient instance. Could there, to any impartial observer, be anything in the world more incredible than that the Pope, surrounded by ritual and pomp, and hierarchies, and policies, should be held to be the representative on earth of the peasant-teacher of Galilee ? And yet the melancholy process of development is plain enough.

As the world became Christianised, it could not be expected to give up its social order, its ambitions, its love of power and influence. Christianity uncurbed is an inconvenient, a dangerous, a subversive force; it must be tamed and muzzled; it must be robed and crowned; it must be given a high and honoured place among institutions. And so it has fallen a victim to bribery and intrigue and worldly power.

I do not for a moment say that it does not even thus inspire thousands of hearts to simple, loving, and heroic conduct. The secret is far too vital to lose its power. It is a vast force in the world, and indeed survives its capture in virtue of its truth and beauty. But instead of being the most free, the most independent, the most individualistic force in the world, it has become the most authoritarian, the most traditional, the most rigid of systems. As in the tale of Gulliver, it is a giant indeed, and can yet perform gigantic services; but it is bound and fettered by a puny race.

Further, there are some who would divide religion sharply into two aspects, the objective and the subjective. Those who emphasise the objective aspect, would maintain that the theory that underlies all religion is the idea of sacrifice. This view is held strongly by Roman Catholics and by a large section of Anglicans as well. They would

hold that the duty of the priest is the offering of this sacrifice, and that the essential truth of the Christian revelation was the sacrifice of God Himself upon God's own altar. This sacrifice, this atonement, they would say, can be and must be made, over and over, upon the altar of God. They would hold that this offering had its objective value, even though it were offered without the mental concurrence of those for whom it was offered. They would urge that the primal necessity for the faithful is that by an act of the will,—not necessarily an emotional act, but an act of pure and definite volition,—they should associate themselves with the true and perfect sacrifice; that souls that do this sincerely are caught up, so to speak, into the heavenly chariot of God, and move upward thus; while the merely subjective and emotional religion is, to continue the metaphor, as if a man should gird up his loins to run in company with the heavenly impulse. They would say that the objective act of worship may have a subjective emotional effect, but that it has a true value quite independent of any subjective effect. They would say that the idea of sacrifice is a primal instinct of human nature, implanted in hearts by God himself, and borne witness to by the whole history of man.

Those who, like myself, believe rather in the

subjective side, the emotional effect of religion, would hold that the idea of sacrifice is certainly a primal human instinct, but that the true interpretation has been put upon it by the teaching of Christ. I should myself feel that the idea of sacrifice belonged wholly to the old dispensation. That man, when he began to form some mental picture of the mysterious nature of the world of which he found himself a part, saw that there was, in the background of life, a vast and awful power, whose laws were mysterious and not, apparently, wholly benevolent; that this power sometimes sent happiness and prosperity, sometimes sorrow and adversity; and that though to a certain extent calamities were brought about by individual misconduct, yet that there were innumerable instances in the world where innocence and even conscientious conduct were just as heavily penalised as guilt and sin. The apparently fortuitous distribution of happiness would alarm and bewilder him. The natural instinct of man, thus face to face with a Deity which he could not hope to overcome or struggle with, would be to conciliate and propitiate him by all the means in his power, as he would offer gifts to a prince or chief. He would hope thus to win his favour and not to incur his wrath.

But the teaching of the Saviour that God was

indeed a Father of men seems to me to have changed all this instantaneously. Man would learn that misfortune was sent him, not wantonly nor cruelly, but that it was an educative process. If even so he saw cases, such as a child tortured by agonising pain, where there seemed to be no personal educative motive that could account for it, no sense of punishment which could be meant to improve the sufferer, he would fall back on the thought that each man is not isolated or solitary, but that there is some essential unity that binds humanity together, and that suffering at one point must, in some mysterious way that he cannot understand, mean amelioration at another. To feel this would require the exercise of faith, because no human ingenuity could grasp the method by which such a system could be applied. But there would be no choice between believing this, or deciding that whatever the essential nature of the Mind of God was, it was not based on human ideas of justice and benevolence.

The theory of religion would then be that the crude idea of propitiatory and conciliatory sacrifice would fall to the ground; that to use the inspired words of the old Roman poet—

> "Aptissima quæque dabunt Dî.
> Carior est illis homo quam sibi";

and that the only sacrifices required of man would

be, on the one hand, the sacrifice of selfish desires, evil tendencies, sinful appetites; and, on the other hand, the voluntary abnegation of comfortable and desirable things, in the presence of a noble aim, a great idea, a generous purpose.

Religion would then become a purely subjective thing; an intense desire to put the human will in harmony with the Divine will, a hopeful, generous, and trustful attitude of soul, a determination to receive suffering and pain as a gift from the Father, as bravely and sincerely as the gift of happiness and joy, with a fervent faith that God did indeed, by implanting in men so ardent a longing for strength and joy, and so deeply rooted a terror of pain and weakness, imply that He intended joy, of a purified and elevated kind, to be the ultimate inheritance of His creatures; and the sacrifice of man would then be the willing resignation of everything which could in any degree thwart the ultimate purpose of God.

That I believe from the depths of my heart to be the meaning of the Christian revelation; and I should look upon the thought of objective sacrifice as being an unworthy survival from a time when men had little true knowledge of the Fatherly Heart of God.

And thus, to my mind, the only possible theory of worship is that it is a deliberate act, an opening

of the door that leads to the Heavenly presence. Any influence is religious which fills the mind with gratitude and peace, which makes a man humble and patient and wise, which teaches him that the only happiness possible is to attune and harmonise his mind with the gracious purpose of God.

And so religion and worship grow to have a larger and wider significance; for though the solemnities of religion are one of the doors through which the soul can approach God, yet what is known as religious worship is only as it were a postern by the side of the great portals of beauty and nobility and truth. One whose heart is filled with a yearning mystery at the sight of the starry heavens, who can adore the splendour of noble actions, courageous deeds, patient affections, who can see and love the beauty so abundantly shed abroad in the world, who can be thrilled with ecstasy and joy by art and music, he can at all these moments draw near to God, and open his soul to the influx of the Divine Spirit.

Religion can only be of avail so long as it takes account of all the avenues by which the soul can reach the central presence; and the error into which professional ecclesiastics fall is the error of the scribes and Pharisees, who said that thus and thus only, by these rites and sacrifices and

ceremonies, shall the soul have access to the Father of all living. It is as false a doctrine as would be the claim of scientific men or artists, if they maintained that only through science or only through art should men draw near to God. For all the intuitions by which men can perceive the Father are sacred, are religious. And no one may perversely bind that which is free, or make unclean that which is pure, without suffering the doom of those who would delude humanity into worshipping an idol of man's devising, rather than the Spirit of God Himself.

Now the question must be asked, how are those who are Christians indeed, who adore in the inmost shrine of their spirit the true Christ, who believe that the Star of the East still shines in unveiled splendour over the place where the young child is, how are they to be true to their Lord? Are they to protest against the tyranny of intellect, of authority, of worldliness, over the Gospel? I would say that they have no need thus to protest. I would say that, if they are true to the spirit of Christ, they have no concern with revolutionary ideals at all; Christ's own example teaches us to leave all that on one side, to conform to worldly institutions, to accept the framework of society. The tyranny of which I have spoken is not to be directly attacked. The true concern

of the believer is to be his own attitude to life, his relations with the circle, small or great, in which he finds himself. He knows that if indeed the spirit of Christ could truly leaven the world, the pomps, the glories, the splendours which veil it, would melt like unsubstantial wreaths of smoke. He need not trouble himself about traditional ordinances, elaborate ceremonials, subtle doctrines, metaphysical definitions. He must concern himself with far different things. Let him be sure that no sin is allowed to lurk unresisted in the depths of his spirit; let him be sure that he is patient, and just, and tender-hearted, and sincere; let him try to remedy true affliction, not the affliction which falls upon men through their desire to conform to the elaborate usage of society, but the affliction which seems to be bound up with God's own world. Let him be quiet and peaceable; let him take freely the comfort of the holy influences which Churches, for all their complex fabric of traditions and ceremony, still hold out to the spirit; let him drink largely from all sources of beauty, both natural and human; the Churches themselves have gained, by age, and gentle associations, and artistic perception, a large treasure of things that are full of beauty—architecture and music and ceremony—that are only hurtful when held to be special and peculiar channels of holi-

ness and sweetness, when they are supposed to have a definite sanctification which is opposed to the sanctification of the beauty exterior to them. Let the Christian be grateful for the beauty they hold, and use it freely and simply. Only let him beware of thinking that what is the open inheritance of the world is in the possession of any one smaller circle. Let him not even seek to go outside of the persuasion, as it is so strangely called, in which he was born. Christ spoke little of sects, and the fusion of sects, because He contemplated no Church, in the sense in which it is now too often used, but a unity of feeling which should overspread the earth. The true Christian will recognise his brethren not necessarily in the Church or sect to which he belongs, but in all who live humbly, purely, and lovingly, in dependence on the Great Father of all living.

For after all, disguise it from ourselves as we will, we are all girt about with dark mysteries, into which we have to look whether we dare or not. We fill our life as full as we can of occupation and amusements, of warmth and comfort; yet sometimes, as we sit in our peaceful room, the gust pipes thin and shrill round the corners of the court, the rain rustles in the tree; we drop the book which we hold, and wonder what manner of things we indeed are, and what we shall be.

Perhaps one of our companions is struck down, and goes without a word or sign on his last journey ; or some heavy calamity, some loss, some bereavement hangs over our lives, and we enter into the shadow ; or some inexplicable or hopeless suffering involves one whom we love, from which the only deliverance is death ; and we realise that there is no explanation, no consolation possible. In such moments we tend to think that the world is a very terrible place, and that we pay a heavy price for our share in it. How unsubstantial then appear our hopes and dreams, our little ambitions, our paltry joys ! In such a mood we feel that the most definite creed illumines, as it were, but a tiny streak of the shadowy orb ; and we are visited, too, by the fear that the more definite the creed, the more certain it is that it is only a desperate human attempt to state a mystery which cannot be stated, in a world where all is dark.

In such a despairing mood, we can but resign ourselves to the awful Will of God, who sets us here, we know not why, and hurries us hence, we know not whither. Yet the very sternness and inexorability of that dread purpose has something that sustains and invigorates. We look back upon our life, and feel that it has all followed a plan and a design, and that the worst evils we have had to bear have been our faithless terrors about what

should be; and then we feel the strength that ebbed from us drawing back to sustain us; we recognise that our present sufferings have never been unbearable; that there has always been some residue of hope; we read of how brave men have borne intolerable calamities, and have smiled in the midst of them, at the reflection that they have never been so hard as was anticipated; and then we are happy if we can determine that, whatever comes, we will try to do our best, in our small sphere, to live as truly and purely as we can, to practise courage and sincerity, to help our fellow-sufferers along, to guard innocence, to guide faltering feet, to encourage all the sweet and wholesome joys of life, to be loving, tender-hearted, generous, to lift up our hearts; not to be downcast and resentful because we do not understand everything at once, but humbly and gratefully to read the scroll as it is unrolled.

The night grows late. I rise to close my outer door to shut myself out from the world; I shall have no more visitors now. The moonlight lies cold and clear on the little court; the shadow of the cloister pillars falls black on the pavement. Outside, the town lies hushed in sleep; I see the gables and chimneys of the clustered houses standing in a quiet dream over the old ivy-covered wall.

The college is absolutely still, though one or two lights still burn in studious rooms, and peep through curtained chinks. What a beautiful place to live one's life in, a place which greets one with delicate associations, with venerable beauty, at every turn! The moonlight falls through the tall oriel of the Hall, and the armorial shields burn and glow with rich points of colour. I pace to and fro, wondering, musing. All here seems so permanent, so still, so secure, and yet we are spinning and whirling through space to some unknown goal. What are the thoughts of the mighty unresting Heart, to whose vastness and agelessness the whole mass of these flying and glowing suns are but as a handful of dust that a boy flings upon the air? How has He set me here, a tiny moving atom, yet more sure of my own minute identity than I am of all the vast panorama of things which lie outside of me? Has He indeed a tender and a patient thought of me, the frail creature whom He has moulded and made? I do not doubt it; I look up among the star-sown spaces, and the old aspiration rises in my heart, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even into His presence!" How would I go, like a tired and sorrowful child to his father's knee, to be comforted and encouraged, in perfect trust and love, to be raised in His arms, to be held to

His heart! He would but look in my face, and I should understand without a question, without a word.

Now in its mouldering turret the old clock wakes and stirs, moves its jarring wires, and the soft bell strikes midnight. Another of my few short days gone, another step nearer to the unseen. Slowly but not sadly I return, for I have been for a moment nearer God; the very thought that rises in my mind, and turns my heart to His, comes from Him. He would make all plain, if He could; He gives us what we need; and when we at last awake we shall be satisfied.

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